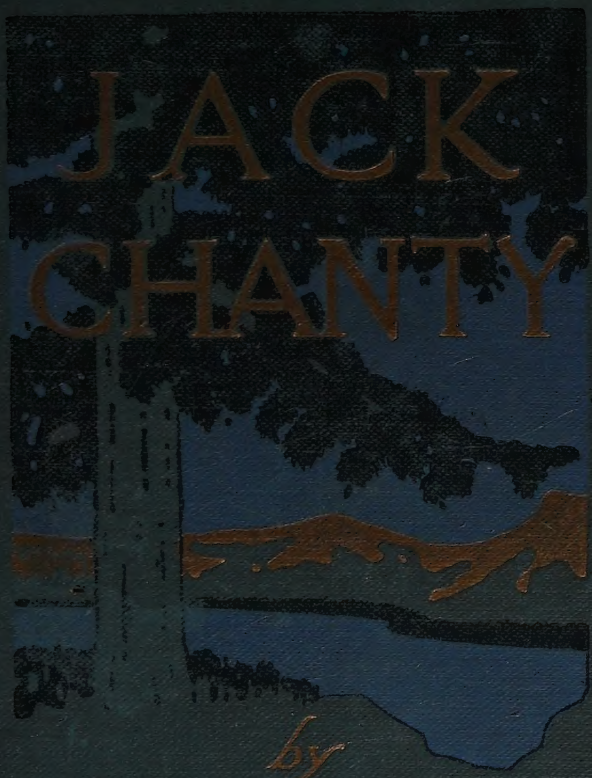
# JACK CHANTY



*by*

HULBERT FOOTNER

THE
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG
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"Such was Jack Chanty, sprawling on his little raft"

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# JACK CHANTY

## A Story of Athabasca

by

Hulbert Footner

*Author of*

"New Rivers of the North"

"Two on the Trail, Etc."

TORONTO

The Musson Book Co.

LIMITED

Printed in Garden City, N. Y., U. S. A.

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TO
F. C. F.

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# JACK CHANTY

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## I

## THE HAIR-CUT

THE surface of the wide, empty river rang with it like a sounding-board, and the undisturbed hills gave it back, the gay song of a deep-chested man. The musical execution was not remarkable, but the sound was as well suited to the big spaces of the sunny river as the call of a moose to the October woods, or the ululation of a wolf to a breathless winter's night. The zest of youth and of singing was in it; to that the breasts of any singer's hearers cannot help but answer.

"Oh! pretty Polly Oliver, the pri-ide of her sex;
The love of a grenadier he-er poor heart did vex.
He courted her so faithfu-ul in the good town of Bow,
But marched off to foreign lands a-fi-ighting the foe."

The singer was luxuriously reclining on a tiny raft made of a single dry trunk cut into four lengths laced together with rope. His back was supported by two canvas bags containing his grub and all his worldly goods, and a banjo lay against his raised

thighs. From afar on the bosom of the great stream he looked like a doll afloat on a shingle. The current carried him down, and the eddies waltzed him slowly around and back, providing him agreeable views up and down river and athwart the noble hills that hemmed it in.

"I cannot live si-ingle, and fa-alse I'll not prove,
So I'll 'list for a drummer-boy and follow my love.
Peaked ca-ap, looped jacke-et, whi-ite gaiters and drum,
And marching so manfully to my tru-ue love I'll come."

Between each verse the banjo supplied a rollicking obbligato.

His head was bare, and the waves of his thick, sunburnt hair showed half a dozen shades ranging between sienna and ochre. As to his face, it was proper enough to twenty-five years old; an abounding vitality was its distinguishing character. He was not too good-looking; he had something rarer than mere good looks, an individuality of line and colouring. It was his own face, suggesting none of the recognized types of faces. He had bright blue eyes under beautifully modelled brows, darker than his hair. One eyebrow was cocked a little higher than the other, giving him a mocking air. In repose his lips came together in a thin, resolute line that suggested a hard streak under his gay youthfulness.

He was wearing a blue flannel shirt open at the throat, with a blue and white handkerchief knotted loosely away from it, and he had on faded blue overalls

tucked into the tops of his mocassins. These mocassins provided the only touch of coxcombry to his costume; they were of the finest white doeskin elaborately worked with silk flowers. Such footwear is not for sale in the North, but may be surely construed as a badge of the worker's favour.

Such was Jack Chanty, sprawling on his little raft, and abandoning himself to the delicious sunshine and the delights of song. It was July on the Spirit River; he was twenty-five years old, and the blood was coursing through his veins; inside his shirt he felt the weight of a little canvas bag of yellow gold, and he knew where there was plenty more to be had. Is it any wonder he was filled with a sense of well-being so keen it was almost a pain? Expanding his chest, he threw back his head and relieved himself of a roaring fortissimo that made the hills ring again:

"'Twas the battle of Ble-enheim, in a ho-ot fusillade,
A poor little drummer-boy was a prisoner made.
But a bra-ave grenadier fou-ought hi-is way through the foe,
And fifteen fierce Frenchmen toge-ether laid low.

"He took the boy tenderly in his a-arms as he swooned,
He opened his ja-acket for to search for a wound.
Oh! pretty Polly Olive-er, my-y bravest, my bride!
Your true love shall nevermore be to-orn from your side!"

By and by the raft was carried around a wide bend, and the whitewashed buildings of Fort Cheever stole into view down the river. Jack's eyes gleamed, and

he put away the banjo. It was many a day since he had hobnobbed with his own kind, and what is the use of gold if there is no chance to squander it?

Sitting up, he applied himself to his paddle. Edging the raft toward the left-hand bank, he left the main current at the head of an island, and, shooting over a bar, paddled through the sluggish backwater on the shore of which the little settlement lay. As he came close the buildings were hidden from him by the high bank; only the top of the "company's" flagpole showed. The first human sound that struck on his ears was the vociferous, angry crying of a boy-child.

Rounding a little point of the bank, the cause of the commotion was revealed. Jack grinned, and held his paddle. The sluggish current carried him toward the actors in the scene, and they were too intent to observe him. A half-submerged, flat-bottomed barge was moored to the shore. On the decked end of it a young girl in a blue print dress was seated on a box, vigorously soaping an infant of four. Two other ivory-skinned cupids, one older, one younger, were playing in the warm water that partly filled the barge. Their clothes lay in a heap behind the girl.

She was a very pretty girl; the mere sight of her caused Jack's breast to lift and his heart to set up a slightly increased beating. It was so long since he had seen one! Her soft lips were determinedly pressed together; in one hand she gripped the thin arm of her captive, while with the other she applied the soap

until his writhing little body flashed in the sun as if burnished. Struggles and yells were in vain. The other two children played in the water, callously indifferent to the sufferings of their brother. It was clear they had been through their ordeal.

The girl, warned of an approaching presence, raised a pair of startled eyes. Her captive, feeling the vise relax, plunged into the water of the barge with incredible swiftness, and, rapturously splashing off the hated soap, joined his brothers at the other end, safely out of her reach. The girl blushed for their nakedness. They themselves stared open-mouthed at the stranger without any embarrassment at all. The fat baby was sitting in the water, turned into stone with astonishment, like a statue of Buddha in a flood.

Something in the young man's frank laugh reassured the girl, and she laughed a little too, though blushing still. She glowed with youth and health, deep-bosomed as Ceres, and all ivory and old rose. Her delicious, soft, roundness was a tantalizing sight to a hungry youth. But there was something more than mere provoking loveliness — her large brown eyes conveyed it, a disquieting wistfulness even while she laughed.

He brought his raft alongside the barge, and, rising, extended his hand according to the custom of the country. Hastily wiping her own soapy hand on her apron, she laid it in his. Both thrilled to the touch, and their eyes quailed from each other. Jack quickly

recovered himself. Lovely as she might be, she was none the less a "native," and therefore to a white man fair game. Naturally he took the world as he found it.

"You are Mary Cranston," he said. "I should have known if there was another like you in the country," his bold eyes added.

The girl lowered her eyes. "Yes," she murmured.

Her voice astonished him, and filled him with the desire to make her speak again. "You don't know who I am," he said.

She glanced at the banjo case. "Jack Chanty," she said softly.

"Good!" he cried. "That's what it is to be famous!" Their eyes met, and they laughed as at a rich joke. Her laugh was as sweet as the sound of falling water in the ears of thirst, and the name he went by as spoken by her rang in his ears with rare tenderness.

"How did you know?" he asked curiously.

"Everybody knows about everybody up here," she said. "There are so few! You came from across the mountains, and have been prospecting under Mount Tetrahedron since the winter. The Indians who came in to trade told us about the banjo, and about the many songs you sang, which were strange to them."

The ardour of his gaze confused her. She broke off, and, to hide her confusion, turned abruptly to the staring ivory cupids. "Andy, come here!" she com-

manded in the voice of sisterly authority. "Colin! Gibbie! Come and get dressed!"

Andy and Colin grinned sheepishly, and stayed where they were. The smile of Andy, the elder, was toothless and exasperating. As for the infant Buddha, he continued to sit unmoved, to suck his thumb, and to stare.

She stamped her foot. "Andy! Come here this minute! Colin! Gibbie!" she repeated in a voice of helpless vexation.

They did not move.

"Look sharp, young 'uns!" Jack suddenly roared.

Of one accord, as if galvanized into life, they scrambled toward their sister, making a detour around the far side of the barge to avoid Jack.

Mary rewarded him with a smile, and dealt out the clothes with a practised hand. Andy, clasping his garments to his breast, set off over the plank to the shore, and was hauled back just in time.

"He has to have his hair cut, because the steamboat is coming," his sister explained; "and I don't see how I can hold on to him while I am dressing the others."

"Pass him over here," said Jack.

Andy, struck with terror, was deposited on the raft, whence escape was impossible without passing the big man, and commanded to dress himself without more ado.

Mary regarded the other two anxiously. "They're beginning to shiver," she said, "and I can't dress both at once."

Jack sat on the edge of the barge with his feet on the raft. "Give me the baby," he said.

"You couldn't dress a baby," she said, with a provoking dimple in either cheek.

"Yes, I can, if he wears pants," said Jack serenely. "There's no mystery about pants."

"Besides, he'd yell," she objected.

"No, he won't," said Jack. "Try him and see."

And in sooth he did not yell, but sat on Jack's knee while his little shirt was pulled over his head and buttoned, sucking his thumb, and staring at Jack with a piercing, unflinching stare.

"You have a way with babies," the girl said in the sweet, hushed voice that continually astonished him.

He looked at her with his mocking smile. "And with girls?" his eyes asked boldly.

She blushed, and attended strictly to Colin's buttons.

Colin, fully attired in shirt, troussers, and moccasins, was presently dismissed over the plank. He lingered on the shore, shouting opprobrious epithets to his elder, still in captivity. At the same time the baby was dressed in the smallest pair of long pants ever made. He was as bow-legged as a bulldog. Jack leaned back, roaring with laughter at the figure of gravity he made. Gibbie didn't mind. He could walk, but he preferred to sit. He continued to sit cross-legged on the end of the barge, and to stare.

Next, Andy was seated on the box, while Mary, kneeling behind him, produced her scissors.

"If you don't sit still you'll get the top of your ears cut off!" she said severely.

But sitting still was difficult under the taunts from ashore.

"Jutht you wait till I git aholt of you," lisped the toothless one, proving that the language of unregenerate youth is much the same on the far-off Spirit River as it is on the Bowery.

Jack returned to the raft and unstrapped the banjo case. "Be a good boy and I'll sing you a song," he said, presumably to Andy, but looking at Mary meanwhile.

At the sound of the tuning-up the infant Buddha in long pants gravely arose stern foremost, and reseated himself at the edge of the barge, where he could get a better view of the player.

Jack chose another rollicking air, but a new tone had crept into his deep voice. He sang softly, for he had no desire to bring others down the bank to interrupt his further talk with Mary.

"Oh, the pretty, pretty creature!
When I next do meet her
No more like a clown will I face her frown,
But gallantly will I treat her,
But gallantly will I treat her,
Oh, the pretty, pretty creature!"

The infant Buddha condescended to smile, and to bounce once or twice on his fundament by way of applause. Andy sat as still as a surprised chipmunk.

Colin was sorry now that he had cut himself off from the barge. As for the boy's big sister, she kept her eyes veiled, and plied the scissors with slightly languorous motions of the hands. Even a merry song may work a deal of sentimental damage under certain conditions. And the sun shone, and the bright river moved down.

"Thank you," she said, when he had come to the end. "We never have music here."

Jack wondered where she had learned her pretty manners.

The hair-cutting was concluded. Andy sprang up looking like a little zebra with alternate dark and light stripes running around his head, and a narrow bang like a forelock in the middle of his forehead. Jack put away the banjo, and Andy, seeing that there was to be no more music, set off in chase of Colin. The two of them disappeared over the bank. Mary gathered up towels, soap, comb, and scissors preparatory to following them.

"Don't go yet," said Jack eagerly.

"I must," she said, but lingering. "There is much to be done before the steamboat comes."

"She's only expected," said Jack of the knowledge born of experience. "It'll be a week before she comes."

Mary displayed no great eagerness to be gone.

A bold idea had been making a covert shine in Jack's eyes during the last minute or two. It suddenly found expression. "Cut my hair," he blurted out.

She started and blushed. "Oh, I — I couldn't cut a man's hair," she stammered.

"What's the difference?" demanded Jack with a great parade of innocence. "Hair is just hair, isn't it?"

"I couldn't," she repeated naïvely. "It would confuse me so!"

The thought of her confusion was delicious to him. He was standing below her on the raft. "Look," he said, lowering his head. "It needs it. I'm a sight!"

Since in this position he could not see her face, she allowed her eyes to dwell for a moment on the tawny silken sheaves that he exhibited. Such bright hair was wonderful to her. It seemed to her as if the sun itself was netted in its folds.

"I — I couldn't," she repeated, but weakly.

He swung about and sat on the edge of the barge. "Make out I am your other little brother," he said insinuatingly. "I can't see you, so it's all right. Just one little snip to see how it goes!"

The temptation was too great to be resisted. She bent over, and the blades of the scissors met. In her agitation she cut a wider swath than she intended and a whole handful of hair fell to the deck.

"Oh!" she cried remorsefully.

"Now you'll have to do the whole thing," said Jack quickly. "You can't leave me looking like a half-clipped poodle."

With a guilty look over her shoulder she drew up the box and sat down behind him. Gibbie, the youngest of the Cranstons, was a solemn and interested spectator. Jack thrilled a little and smiled at the touch of her trembling fingers in his hair. At the same time he was not unaware of the decorative value of his luxuriant thatch, and it occurred to him he was running a considerable risk of disfigurement at her hands.

"Not so short as Andy's," he suggested anxiously.

"I will be careful," she said.

The scissors snipped busily, and the rich yellow-brown hair fell all around the deck. Mary eyed it covetously. One shining twist of it dropped in her lap. He could not see her. In a twinkling it was stuffed inside her belt.

Meanwhile Jack continued to smile with softened eyes. "Hair-cutting was never like this," he murmured. He was tantalized by the recollection of her voice, and he cast about in his mind for something to lead her to talk more freely. "You were not here when I came through two years ago," he said.

"I was away at school," she said.

"Where ?"

"The mission at Caribou Lake."

"Did you like it there?"

He felt the shrug in her finger-tips. "It is the best there is," she said quietly.

"It's a shame!" said Jack. There was a good deal unspoken here. "A shame you should be obliged to

associate with those savages," he implied, and she understood.

"Have you ever been outside?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes, with somebody I liked," she said in her simple way.

"With me?" he asked in the off-hand tone that may be taken any way the hearer pleases.

Her simplicity was not dullness. "No," she said quickly. "You would tell me funny lies about everything."

"But you would laugh, and you would like it," he said.

She had nothing to say to this.

"Outside they have regular shops for shaving and cutting hair," he went on. "Barber-shops they are called."

"I know," she said offended. "I read."

"I'll bet you didn't know there was a lady barber in Prince George."

"Nice kind of lady!" she said.

The obvious retort slipped thoughtlessly off his tongue. "I like that! What are you doing?"

Her eyes filled with tears, and the scissors faltered. "Well, I wouldn't do it for — I — I wouldn't do it all the time," she murmured deeply hurt.

He twisted his head at the imminent risk of impaling an eye on the scissors. The tears astonished him.

Everything about her astonished him. In no respect did she coincide with his experience of "native" girls. He was vain enough for a good-looking young man of twenty-five, but he did not suspect that to a lonely and imaginative girl his coming down the river might have had all the effect of the advent of the yellow-haired prince in a fairy-tale. Jack was not imaginative.

He reached for her free hand. "Say, I'm sorry," he said clumsily. "It was only a joke! It's mighty decent of you to do it for me."

She snatched her hand away, but smiled at him briefly and dazzlingly. She was glad to be hurt if he would let that tone come into his mocking voice.

"I was just silly," she said shortly.

The hair-cutting went on.

"What do you read?" asked Jack curiously.

"We get newspapers and magazines three times a year by the steamboat," she said. "And I have a few books. I like 'Lalla Rookh' and 'Marmion' best."

Jack, who was not acquainted with either, preserved a discreet silence.

"Father has sent out for a set of Shakespeare for me," she went on. "I am looking forward to it."

"It's better on the stage," said Jack. "What fun to take you to the theatre!"

She made no comment on this. Presently the scissors gave a concluding snip.

"Lean over and look at yourself in the water," she commanded.

Obeying, he found to his secret relief that his looks had not suffered appreciably. "That's out of sight!" he said heartily, turning to her. "I say, I'm ever so much obliged to you."

An awkward silence fell between them. Jack's growing intention was clearly evident in his eye, but she did not look at him.

"I — I must pay you," he said at last, a little breathlessly.

She understood that very well, and sprang up, the scissors ringing on the hollow deck. They were both pale. She turned to run, but the box was in her way. Leaping from the raft to the barge, he caught her in his arms, and as she strained away he kissed her round firm cheek and her fragrant neck beneath the ear. He roughly pressed her averted head around, and crushed her soft lips under his own.

Then she got an arm free, and he received a short-arm box on the ear that made his head ring. She tore herself out of his arms, and faced him from the other side of the barge, panting and livid with anger.

"How dare you! How dare you!" she cried.

Jack leaned toward her, breathing no less quickly than she. "You're lovely! You're lovely," he murmured swiftly. "I never saw anybody like you before. I'll camp quarter of a mile down river, out of the way. Come down to-night, and I'll sing to you."

"I won't!" she cried. "I'll never speak to you again! I hate you!" She indicated the unmoved in-

fant Buddha with a tragic gesture. "And before the baby, too!" she cried. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Jack laughed a little sheepishly. "Well, he's too young to tell," he said.

"But what will he think of me?" she cried despairingly. Stooping, she swept the little god into her arms, and, running over the plank, disappeared up the bank.

"I'll be waiting for you," Jack softly called after her. She gave no sign of hearing.

Jack sat down on the edge of the barge again. He brushed the cut hair into the water, and watched it float away with an abstracted air. As he stared ahead of him a slight line appeared between his eyebrows which may have been due to compunction. Whatever the uncomfortable thought was, he presently whistled it away after the manner of youth, and, drawing his raft up on the stones, set to work to take stock of his grub.

## II

## THE COMPANY FROM "OUTSIDE."

THE Hudson Bay Company's buildings at Fort Cheever were built, as is customary, in the form of a hollow square, with one side open to the river. The store occupied one side of the square, the warehouse was opposite, and at the top stood the trader's house in the midst of its vegetable garden fenced with palings. The old palisade about the place had long ago disappeared, and nothing military remained except the flagpole and an ancient little brass cannon at its foot, blackened with years of verdigris and dirt. The humbler store of the "French outfit" and the two or three native shacks that completed the settlement lay at a little distance behind the company buildings, and the whole was dropped down on a wide, flat esplanade of grass between the steep bare hills and the river.

To-day at the fort every one was going about his business with an eye cocked downstream. Every five minutes David Cranston came to the door of the store for a look, and old Michel Whitebear, hoeing the trader's garden, rested between every hill of potatoes, to squint his aged eyes in the same direction.

Usually this state of suspense endured for days, sometimes weeks, but upon this trip the river-gods were propitious, and at five o'clock the eagerly listened for whistle was actually heard.

Every soul in the place gathered at the edge of the bank to witness the arrival. At one side, slightly apart, stood the trader and his family. David Cranston was a lean, up-standing Scotchman, an imposing physical specimen with hair and beard beginning to grizzle, and a level, grim, sad gaze. His wife was a handsome, sullen, dark-browed, half-breed woman, who, unlike the majority of her sisters, carried her age well. In his grim sadness and her sullenness was written a domestic tragedy of long-standing. After all these years she was still a stranger in her own house, and an alien to her husband and children. Their children were with them, Mary and six boys ranging from Davy, who was sixteen, down to the infant Buddha.

A small crowd of natives in ragged store clothes, standing and squatting on the bank, and spilling over on the beach below, filled the centre of the picture, and beyond them sat Jack Chanty by himself, on a box that he had carried to the edge of the bank. Between him and Mary the bank made in, so that they were fully visible to each other, and both tinglingly self-conscious. In Jack this took the form of an elaborately negligent air. He whittled a paddle with nice care, glancing at Mary from under his lashes. She could not bring herself to look at him.

While the steamboat was still quarter of a mile downstream, the people began to sense that there was something more than usual in the wind, and a great excitement mounted. We of the outside world, with our telegrams and newspapers and hourly posts, have forgotten what it is to be dramatically surprised. Where can we get a thrill like to that which animated these people as the magic word was passed around: "Passengers!" Presently it could be made out that these were no ordinary passengers, but a group of well-dressed gentlemen, and finally, wonder of wonders! what had never been seen at Fort Cheever before, a white lady — no, two of them!

Mary saw them first, two ladies, corseted, tailored, and marvellously hatted like the very pictures in the magazines that she had secretly disbelieved in. In another minute she made out that one of them, leaning on the upper rail, smiling and chatting vivaciously with her companions, was as young as Mary herself, and as slender and pretty as a mundane fairy.

Mary glanced swiftly at Jack. He, too, was looking at the deck of the steamboat and he had stopped whittling his paddle. A dreadful pang transfixed Mary's breast. Her hands and feet suddenly became enormous to her, and her body seemed like a coarse and shapeless lump. She looked down at her clean, faded print dress; she could have torn it into ribbons. She looked at her dark-browed mother with eyes full of a strange, angry despair. The elder woman had by

this time seen what was coming, and her lip curled scornfully. Mary's eyes filled with tears. She slipped out of the group unseen, and, running back to the house, cast herself on her bed and wept as she had never wept.

The steamboat was moored alongside the half-submerged barge. She came to a stop with the group on the upper deck immediately in front of Jack and a little below him. True to the character of indifference he was fond of assuming, he went on whittling his paddle. At the same time he was taking it all in. The sight of people such as his own people, that he thought he had put behind him forever, raised a queer confusion of feelings in him. As he covertly watched the dashing, expensive, imperious little beauty and three men hanging obsequiously on her words, a certain hard brightness showed briefly in his eyes, and his lips thinned.

It was as if he said: "Aha! my young lady, I know *your* kind! None of you will ever play that game again with me!"

Consequently when her casual glance presently fell on the handsome, young, rough character (as she would no doubt have called him) it was met by a glance even more casual. The young man was clearly more interested in the paddle he was making than in her. Her colour heightened a little and she turned with an added vivacity to her companions. After a long time she looked again. The young man was still intent upon his paddle.

The first to come off the boat was the young purser, who hurried with the mail and the manifests to David Cranston. He was pale under the weight of the announcement he bore.

"We have his honour the lieutenant-governor and party on board," he said breathlessly.

Cranston, because he saw that he was expected to be overcome, remained grimly unconcerned. "So!" he said coolly.

The youngster stared. "The lieutenant-governor," he repeated uncertainly. "He's landing here to make some explorations in the mountains. He joined us without warning at the Crossing. There was no way to let you know."

"We'll do the best we can for his lordship," said Cranston with an ironic curl to his grim lips. "I will speak to my wife."

To her he said under his breath, grimly but not unkindly, "Get to the house, my girl."

She flared up with true savage suddenness. "So, I'm not good enough to be seen with you," she snarled, taking no pains to lower her voice. "I'm your lawful wife. These are my children. Are you ashamed of my colour? You chose me!"

Cranston drew the long breath that calls on patience. "'Tis not your colour that puts me to shame, but your manners," he said sternly. "And if they're bad," he added, "it's not for the lack of teaching. Get to the house!"

She went.

The captain of the steamboat now appeared on the gangplank, ushering an immaculate little gentleman whose sailent features were a Panama hat above price a pointed white beard, neat, agile limbs, and a trim little paunch under a miraculously fitting white waistcoat. Two other men followed, one elderly, one young.

Cranston waited for them at the top of the path.

The captain was a little flustered too. "Mr. Cranston, gentlemen, the company's trader here," he said. "His Honour Sir Bryson Trangmar, the lieutenant-governor of Athabasca," he went on. "Captain Vassall" — the younger man bowed; "Mr. Baldwin Ferrie" — the other nodded.

There was the suspicion of a twinkle in Cranston's eye. Taking off his hat he extended an enormous hand. "How do you do, sir," he said politely. "Welcome to Fort Cheever."

"Charmed! Charmed!" bubbled the neat little gentleman. "Charming situation you have here. Charming river! Charming hills!"

"I regret that I cannot offer you suitable hospitality," Cranston continued in his great, quiet voice. "My house is small, as you see, and very ill-furnished. There are nine of us. But the warehouse shall be emptied before dark and made ready for you. It is the best building here."

"Very kind, I'm sure," said Sir Bryson with offhand condescension — perhaps he sensed the twinkle,

perhaps it was the mere size of the trader that annoyed him; "but we have brought everything needful. We will camp here on the grass between the buildings and the river. Captain Vassall, my aide-de-camp, will see to it. I will talk to you later Mr. —— er?"

"Cranston," murmured the aide-de-camp.

Cranston understood by this that he was dismissed. He sauntered back to the store with a peculiar smile on his grim lips. In the free North country they have never become habituated to the insolence of office, and the display of it strikes them as a very humorous thing, particularly in a little man.

Sir Bryson and the others reconnoitred the grassy esplanade, and chose a spot for the camp. It was decided that the party should remain on the steamboat all night, and go into residence under canvas next day. They then returned on board for supper, and nothing more was seen of the strangers for a couple of hours.

At the end of that time Miss Trangmar and her companion, Mrs. Worsley, arm in arm and hatless, came strolling over the gangplank to enjoy a walk in the lingering evening. At this season it does not become dark at Fort Cheever until eleven.

Jack's raft was drawn up on the beach at the steamboat's bow, and as the ladies came ashore he was disposing his late purchases at the store upon it, preparatory to dropping downstream to the spot where he meant to camp. In order to climb the bank the two had to pass close behind him.

At sight of him the girl's eyes brightened, and, with a mischievous look she said something to her companion.

"Linda!" the older woman remonstrated.

"Everybody speaks to everybody up here," said the girl. "It was understood that the conventions were to be left at home."

Thus Jack was presently startled to hear a clear high voice behind him say: "Are you going to travel on the river with that little thing?"

Hastily straightening his back and turning, he raised his hat. Her look took him unawares. There was nothing of the insolent queenliness in it now. She was smiling at him like a fearless, well-bred little girl. Nevertheless, he reflected, the sex is not confined to the use of a single weapon, and he stiffened.

"I came down the river on it this morning," he said politely and non-committal. "To-night I'm going just a little way to camp."

She was very like a little girl, he thought, being so small and slender, and having such large blue eyes, and such a charming, childlike smile. Her bright brown hair was rolled back over her ears. Her lips were very red, and her teeth perfect. She was wearing a silk waist cunningly contrived with lace, and fitting in severe, straight lines, ever so faintly suggesting the curves beneath. In spite of himself everything about her struck subtle chords in Jack's memory. It was years since he had been so close to a lady.

She was displeased with the manner of his answer. He had shown no trace either of the self-consciousness or the eager complaisance she had expected from a local character. Indeed, his gaze returned to the raft as if he were only restrained by politeness from going on with his preparations. He reminded her of a popular actor in a Western play that she had been to see more times than her father knew of. But the rich colour in Jack's cheek and neck had the advantage of being under the skin instead of plastered on top. Her own cheeks were a thought pale.

"How do you go back upstream?" she asked with an absent air that was intended to punish him.

"You travel as you can," said Jack calmly. "On horseback or afoot."

She pointedly did not wait for the answer, but strayed on up the path as if he had already passed from her mind. Yet as she turned at the top her eyes came back to him as if by accident. She had a view of a broad back, and a bent head intent upon the lashings of the raft. She bit her lip. It was a disconcerting young man.

A few minutes later Frank Garrod, the governor's secretary, who until now had been at work in his cabin upon the correspondence the steamboat was to take back next day, came over the gangplank in pursuit of the ladies. He was a slim and well-favoured young man, of about Jack's age, but with something odd and uncontrolled about him, a young

man of whom it was customary to say he was "queer," without any one's knowing exactly what constituted his queerness. He had black hair and eyes that made a striking contrast with his extreme pallor. The eyes were very bright and restless; all his movements were a little jerky and uneven.

Hearing more steps behind him, Jack looked around abstractedly without really seeing what he looked at. Garrod, however, obtained a fair look into Jack's face, and the sight of it operated on him with a terrible, dramatic suddenness. A doctor would have recognized the symptoms of what he calls shock. Garrod's arms dropped limply, his breath failed him, his eyes were distended with a wild and inhuman fear. For an instant he seemed about to collapse on the stones, but he gathered some rags of self-control about him, and, turning without a sound, went back over the gangplank, swaying a little, and walking with wide-open, sightless eyes like a man in his sleep.

Presently Vassall, the amiable young A. D. C., descending the after stairway, came upon him leaning against the rail on the river-side of the boat, apparently deathly sick.

"Good heavens, Garrod! What's the matter?" he cried.

The other man made a pitiable attempt to carry it off lightly. "Nothing serious," he stammered. "A sudden turn. I have them sometimes. If you have any whiskey ——"

Vassall sprang up the stairway, and presently returned with a flask. Upon gulping down part of the contents, a little colour returned to Garrod's face, and he was able to stand straighter.

"All right now," he said in a stronger voice. "You run along and join the others. Please don't say anything about this."

"I can't leave you like this," said Vassall. "You ought to be in bed."

"I tell you I'm all right," said Garrod in his jerky, irritable way. "Run along. There isn't anything you can do."

Vassall went his way with a wondering air; real tragedy is such a strange thing to be intruding upon our everyday lives. Garrod, left alone, stared at the sluggishly flowing water under the ship's counter with the kind of sick, desirous eyes that so often look over the parapets of bridges in the cities at night. But there were too many people about on the boat; the splash would instantly have betrayed him.

He gathered himself together as with an immense effort, and, climbing the stairway, went to his stateroom. There he unlocked his valise, and drawing out his revolver, a modern hammerless affair, made sure that it was loaded, and slipped it in his pocket. He caught sight of his face in the mirror and shuddered. "As soon as it's dark," he muttered.

He sat down on his bunk to wait. By and by he became conscious of a torturing thirst, and he went out

into the main cabin for water. Jack, meanwhile, having loaded his craft, had boarded the steamboat to see if he could beg or steal a newspaper less than two months old, and the two men came face to face in the saloon.

Garrod made a move to turn back, but it was too late; Jack had recognized him now. Seeing the look of amazement in the other's face, Garrod's hand stole to his hip-pocket, but it was arrested by the sound of Jack's voice.

"Frank!" he cried, and there was nothing but gladness in the sound. "Frank Garrod, by all that's holy!" He sprang forward with outstretched hands. "Old Frank! To think of finding you here!"

Garrod stared in stupid amazement at the smile and the hearty tone. For a moment he was quite unnerved; his hands and his lips trembled. "Is it — is it Malcolm Piers?" he stammered.

"Sure thing!" cried Jack, wringing his hand. "What's the matter with you? You look completely knocked up at the sight of me. I'm no ghost, man! What are you doing up here."

"I'm Sir Bryson's secretary," murmured Garrod, feeling for his words with difficulty.

Jack's delight was as transparent as it was unrestrained. The saloon continued to ring with his exclamations. In the face of it a little steadiness returned to Garrod, but he could not rid his eyes of their amazement and incredulity at every fresh display of Jack's gladness.

"You're looking pretty seedy," Jack broke off to say. "Going the pace, I expect. Now that we've got you up here, you'll have to lead a more godly and regular life, my boy."

"What are you doing up here, Malcolm?" asked Garrod dully.

"Easy with that name around here, old fel'," said Jack carelessly. "I left it off long ago. I'm just Jack Chanty now. It's the name the fellows gave me themselves because I sing by the campfires."

"I understand," said Garrod, with a jerk of eagerness. "Good plan to drop your own name, knocking around up here."

"I had no reason to be ashamed of it," said Jack quickly. "But it's too well known a name in the East. I didn't want to be explaining myself all the time. It was nobody's business, anyway, why I came out here. So I let them call me what they liked."

"Of course," said Garrod.

"Knock around," cried Jack. "That's just what I do! A little river work, a little prospecting, a little hunting and trapping, and one hell of a good time! It beats me how young fellows of blood and muscle can stew their lives away in cities when this is open to them! New country to explore, and game to bring down, and gold to look for. The fun of it, whether you find any or not! This is freedom, Frank, working with your own hands for all you get, and beholden to no man! By Gad! I'm glad I found

you," he went on enthusiastically. "What talks we'll have about people and the places back home! I never could live there now, but I'm often sick to hear about it all. You shall tell me!"

A tremor passed over Garrod's face. "Sure," he said nervously. "I can't stop just this minute, because they're waiting for me up on the bank. But I'll see you later."

"To-morrow, then," said Jack easily; but his eyes followed the disappearing Garrod with a surprised and chilled look. "What's the matter with him?" they asked.

Garrod as he hurried ashore, his hands trembling, and his face working in an ecstasy of relief, murmured over and over to himself. "He doesn't know! He doesn't know!"

## III

## TALK BY THE FIRE

JACK was sitting by his own fire idly strumming on the banjo. Behind him was his canvas "lean-to," open to the fire in front, and with a mosquito bar hanging within. All around his little clearing pressed a thick growth of young poplar, except in front, where the view was open to the river, moving smoothly down, and presenting a burnished silver reflection to the evening sky. The choice of a situation, the proper fire, and the tidy arrangements all bespoke the experienced campaigner. Jack took this sort of thing for granted, as men outside ride back and forth on trolley cars, and snatch hasty meals at lunch counters.

The supper dishes being washed, it was the easeful hour of life in camp, but Jack was not at ease. He played a few bars, and put the banjo down. He tinkered with the fire, and swore when he only succeeded in deadening it. He lit his pipe, and immediately allowed it to go out again. A little demon had his limbs twitching on wires. He continually looked and listened in the direction of the fort, and whenever he fancied he heard a sound his heart rose and beat thickly

in his throat. At one moment he thought: "She'll come," and confidently smiled; the next, for no reason: "She will not come," and frowned, and bit his lip.

Finally he did hear a rustle among the trees. He sprang up with surprised and delighted eyes, and immediately sat down again, picking up the banjo with an off-hand air. Under the circumstances one's pet affectation of unconcern is difficult to maintain.

It was indeed Mary. She broke into the clearing, pale and breathless, and looked at Jack as if she was all ready to turn and fly back again. Jack smiled and nodded as if this were the most ordinary of visits. The smile stiffened in his face, for another followed her into the clearing — Davy, the oldest of her brothers. For an instant Jack was nonplussed, but he had laid it down as a rule that in his dealings with the sex, whatever betide, a man must smile and keep his temper. So, swallowing his disappointment as best he could, he greeted Davy as if he had expected him too.

What Mary had been through during the last few hours may be imagined: how many times she had sworn she would not go, only to have her desires open the question all over again. Perhaps she would not have come if the maddeningly attractive young lady had not appeared on the scene; perhaps she would have found an excuse to come anyway. Be that as it may, she had brought Davy. In this she had not Mrs. Grundy's elaborate code to guide her; it was an idea out of her own head — or an instinct of her heart, rather. Watch-

ing Jack eagerly and covertly to see how he took it, she decided that she had done right. "He will think more of me," she thought with a breath of relief.

She had done wisely of course. Jack, after his first disappointment, was compelled to doff his cap to her. He had never met a girl of the country like this. He bestirred himself to put his visitors at their ease.

"I will make tea," he said, reaching for the copper pot according to the ritual of politeness in the North.

"We have just had tea," Mary said. "Davy will smoke with you."

Mary was now wearing a shawl over the print dress, but instead of clutching it around her in the clumsy native way, she had crossed it on her bosom like a fichu, wound it about her waist, and tucked the ends in. Jack glanced at her approvingly.

Davy was young for his sixteen years, and as slender as a sapling. He had thin, finely drawn features, and eyes that expressed something of the same quality of wistfulness as his sister's. At present he was very ill at ease, but his face showed a certain resoluteness that engaged Jack's liking. The boy shyly produced a pipe that was evidently a recent acquisition, and filled it inexpertly.

Jack's instinct led him to ignore Mary for the present while he made friends with the boy. He knew how. They were presently engaged in a discussion about prairie chicken, in an off-hand, manly tone.

"Never saw 'em so plenty," said Davy. "You only

have to climb the hill to bring back as many as you want."

"What gun do you use?" asked Jack.

The boy's eyes gleamed. "My father has a Lefever gun," he said proudly. "He lets me use it."

"So!" said Jack, suitably impressed. "There are not many in the country."

"She's a very good gun," said Davy patronizingly. "I like to take her apart and clean her," he added boyishly.

"I'd like to go up on the prairie with you while I'm here," said Jack. "But I have no shotgun. I'll have to try and put their eyes out with my twenty-two."

This sort of talk was potent to draw them together. They puffed away, ringing all the changes on it. Mary listened apart as became a mere woman, and the hint of a dimple showed in either cheek. When she raised her eyes they fairly beamed on Jack.

Jack knew that the way to win the hearts of the children of the North is to tell them tales of the wonderful world outside that they all dream about. He led the talk in this direction.

"I suppose you've finished school," he said to Davy, as man to man. "Do you ever think of taking a trip outside?"

The boy hesitated before replying. "I think of it all the time," he said in a low, moved voice. "I feel bad every time the steamboat goes back without me. There is nothing for me here."

"You'll make it some day soon," said Jack heartily.

"I suppose you know Prince George well?" the boy said wistfully.

"Yes," said Jack, "but why stop at Prince George? That's not much of a town. You should see Montreal. That's where I was raised. There's a city for you! All built of stone. Magnificent banks and stores and office buildings ten, twelve, fourteen stories high, and more. You've seen a two-story house at the lake; imagine seven of them piled up one on top of another, with people working on every floor!"

"You're fooling us," said the boy. His and his sister's eyes were shining.

"No, I have seen pictures of them in the magazines," put in Mary quickly.

"There is Notre Dame Street," said Jack dreamily, "and Great St. James, and St. Catherine's, and St. Lawrence Main; I can see them now! Imagine miles of big show-windows lighted at night as bright as sunshine. Imagine thousands of moons hung right down in the street for the people to see by, and you have it!"

"How wonderful!" murmured Mary.

"There is an electric light at Fort Ochre," said the boy, "but I have not seen it working. They say when the trader claps his hands it shines, and when he claps them again it goes out."

Mary blushed for her brother's ignorance. "That's only to fool the Indians," she said quickly. "Of

course there's some one behind the counter to turn it off and on."

Jack told them of railway trains and trolley cars; of mills that wove thousands of yards of cloth in a day, and machines that spit out pairs of boots all ready to put on. The old-fashioned fairy-tales are puerile beside such wonders as these — think of eating your dinner in a carriage that is being carried over the ground faster than the wild duck flies! — moreover, he assured them on his honour that it was all true.

"Tell us about theatres," said Mary. "The magazines have many stories about theatres, but they do not explain what they are."

"Well, a theatre's a son-of-a-gun of a big house with a high ceiling and the floor all full of chairs," said Jack. "Around the back there are galleries with more chairs. In the front there is a platform called the stage, and in front of the stage hangs a big curtain that is let down while the people are coming in, so you can't see what is behind it. It is all brightly lighted, and there's an orchestra, many fiddles and other kinds of music playing together in front of the stage. When the proper time comes the curtain is pulled up," he continued, "and you see the stage all arranged like a picture with beautifully painted scenery. Then the actors and actresses come out on the stage and tell a story to each other. They dance and sing, and make love, and have a deuce of a time generally. That's called a play."

DISCARDED


"Is it nothing but making love?" asked Davy. "Don't they have anything about hunting, or having sport?"

"Sure!" said Jack. "War and soldiers and shooting, and everything you can think of."

"Are the actresses all as pretty as they say?" asked Mary diffidently.

"Not too close," said Jack. "But you see the lights, and the paint and powder, and the fine clothes show them up pretty fine."

"It gives them a great advantage," she commented.

Mary had other questions to ask about actresses. Davy was not especially interested in this subject, and soon as he got an opening therefor he said, looking sidewise at the leather case by the fire:

"I never heard the banjo played."

Jack instantly produced the instrument, and, tuning it, gave them song after song. Brother and sister listened entranced. Never in their lives had they met anybody like Jack Chanty. He was master of an insinuating tone not usually associated with the blatant banjo. Without looking at her, he sang love-songs to Mary that shook her breast. In her wonder and pleasure she unconsciously let fall the guard over her eyes, and Jack's heart beat fast at what he read there.

Warned at last by the darkness, Mary sprang up. "We must go," she said breathlessly.

Davy, who had come unwillingly, was more un-

willing to go. But the hint of "father's" anger was sufficient to start him.

Jack detained Mary for an instant at the edge of the clearing. He dropped the air of the genial host. "I shall not be able to sleep to-night," he said swiftly.

"Nor I," she murmured. "Th — thinking of the theatre," she added lamely.

"When everybody is asleep," he pleaded, "come outside your house. I'll be waiting for you. I want to talk to you alone."

She made no answer, but raised her eyes for a moment to his, two deep, deep pools of wistfulness. "Ah, be good to me! Be good to me," they seemed to plead with him. Then she darted after her brother.

The look sobered Jack, but not for very long. "She'll come," he thought exultingly.

Left alone, he worked like a beaver, chopping and carrying wood for his fire. Under stress of emotion he turned instinctively to violent physical exertion for an outlet. He was more moved than he knew. In an hour, being then as dark as it would get, he exchanged the axe for the banjo, and, slinging it over his back, set forth.

The growth of young poplar stretched between his camp and the esplanade of grass surrounding the buildings of the fort. When he came to the edge of the trees the warehouse was the building nearest to him. Running across the intervening space, he took up his station in the shadow of the corner of it, where he could

watch the trader's house. A path bordered by young cabbages and turnips led from the front door down to the gate in the palings. The three visible windows of the house were dark. At a little distance behind the house the sledge dogs of the company were tethered in a long row of kennels, but there was little danger of their giving an alarm, for they often broke into a frantic barking and howling for no reason except the intolerable ennui of their lives in the summer.

There is no moment of the day in lower latitudes that exactly corresponds to the fairylike night-long summer twilight of the North. The sunset glow does not fade entirely, but hour by hour moves around the Northern horizon to the east, where presently it heralds the sun's return. It is not dark, and it is not light. The world is a ghostly place. It is most like nights at home when the full moon is shining behind light clouds, but with this difference, that here it is the dimness of a great light that embraces the world, instead of the partial obscurity of a lesser.

Jack waited with his eyes glued to the door of the trader's house. There was not a breath stirring. There were no crickets, no katydids, no tree-toads to make the night companionable; only the hoot of an owl, and the far-off wail of a coyote to put an edge on the silence. It was cold, and for the time being the mosquitoes were discouraged. The stars twinkled sedulously like busy things.

Jack waited as a young man waits for a woman at

night, with his ears strained to catch the whisper of her dress, a tremor in his muscles, and his heart beating thickly in his throat. The minutes passed heavily. Once the dogs raised an infernal clamour, and subsided again. A score of times he thought he saw her, but it was only a trick of his desirous eyes. He became cold to the bones, and his heart sunk. As a last resort he played the refrain of the last song he had sung her, played it so softly none but one who listened would be likely to hear. The windows of the house were open.

Then suddenly he sensed a figure appearing from behind the house, and his heart leapt. He lost it in the shadow of the house. He waited breathlessly, then played a note or two. The figure reappeared, running toward him, still in the shadow. It loomed big in the darkness. It started across the open space. Too late Jack saw his mistake. He had only time to fling the banjo behind him, before the man was upon him with a whispered oath.

Jack thought of a rival, and his breast burned. He defended himself as best as he could, but his blows went wide in the darkness. The other man was bigger than he, and nerved by a terrible, quiet passion. To save himself from the other's blows Jack clinched. The man flung him off. Jack heard the sharp impact of a blow he did not feel. The earth leapt up, and he drifted away on the swirling current of unconsciousness.

What happened after that was like the awakening from a vague, bad dream. He had first the impression of descending a long and tempestuous series of rapids on his flimsily hung raft, to which he clung desperately. Then the scene changed and he seemed to be floating in a ghastly void. He thought he was blind. He put out his hand to feel, and his palm came in contact with the cool, moist earth, overlaid with bits of twig and dead leaves, and sprouts of elastic grass. The earth at least was real, and he felt of it gratefully, while the rest of him still teetered in emptiness.

Then he became conscious of a comfortable emanation, as from a fire; sight returned, and he saw that there was a fire. It had a familiar look; it was the fire he himself had built some hours before. He felt himself, and found that he was covered by his own blanket. "I have had a nightmare," he thought mistily. Then a voice broke rudely on his vague fancies, bringing the shock of complete recollection in its train.

"So, you're coming 'round all right," it said grimly.

At his feet, Jack saw David Cranston sitting on a log.

"I've put the pot on," he continued. "I'll have a sup of tea for you in a minute. I didn't mean to hit you so hard, my lad, but I was mad."

Jack turned his head, and hid it in his arm. Dizzy, nauseated, and shamed, he was as near blubbering at

that moment as a self-respecting young man could let himself get in the presence of another man.

"Clean hit, point of the jaw," Cranston went on. "Nothing broke. You'll be as right as ever with the tea."

He made it, and forced Jack to drink of the scalding infusion. In spite of himself, it revived the young man, but it did not comfort his spirit any.

"I'm all right now," he muttered, meaning: "You can go!"

"I'll smoke a pipe wi' you," said Cranston imperturbably. "I want a bit of a crack wi' you." Seeing Jack's scowl, he added quickly: "Lord! I'm not going to preach over you, lying there. You tried to do me an injury, a devilish injury, but the mad went out wi' the blow that stretched ye. I wish to do you justice. I mind as how I was once a young sprig myself, and hung around outside the tepees at night, and tried to whistle the girls out. But I never held by such a tingle-pingle contraption as that," he said scornfully, pushing the banjo with his foot. "To my mind it's for niggers and Eyetalians. 'Tis unmanly."

Jack raised his head. "Did you break it?" he demanded scowling.

"Nay," said Cranston coolly. "I brought it along wi' you. It's property, and I spoil nothing that is not my own."

There was a silence. Cranston with the greatest

deliberation, took out his pipe and stuck it in his mouth; produced his plug of tobacco, shaved it nicely, and put it away again; rolled the tobacco thoroughly between his palms, and pressed it into the bowl with a careful forefinger. A glowing ember from the fire completed the operation. For five minutes he smoked in silence, occasionally glancing at Jack from under heavy brows.

"Have ye anything to say?" he asked at last.

"No," muttered Jack.

There was another silence. Cranston sat as if he meant to spend the night.

"I don't get too many chances to talk to a white man," he finally said with a kind of gruff diffidence. "Yon pretty fellows sleeping on the steamboat, they are not men, but clothespins. Sir Bryson Trangmar, Lord love ye! he will be calling me 'my good man' to-morrow. And him a grocer once, they say — like myself." There was a cavernous chuckle here.

Jack sensed that the grim old trader was actually making friendly advances, but the young man was to sore, too hopelessly in the wrong, to respond right away.

Cranston continued to smoke and to gaze at the fire.

"Well, I have something to say," he blurted out at last, in a changed voice. "And it's none too easy!" There was something inexpressibly moving in the tremor that shook his grim voice as he blundered on. "You made a mistake, young fellow. She's too good

for this 'whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad,' business, If you had any sense you would have seen it for yourself — my little girl with her wise ways! But no offence. You are young. I wouldn't bother wi' ye at all, but I feel that I am responsible. It was I who gave them a dark-skinned mother. I handicapped my girl and my boys, and now I have to be their father and their mother too."

A good deal less than this would have reached Jack's sense of generosity. He hid his face again, and hated himself, but pride still maintained the ascendency. He could not let the other man see.

"It is that that makes you hold her so lightly," Cranston went on. "If she had a white mother, my girl, aye, wi' half her beauty and her goodness, would have put the fear of God into ye. Well, the consequences of my mistake shall not be visited on her head if I can prevent it. What does an idle lad like you know of the worth of women? You measure them by their beauty, which is nothing. She has a mind like an opening flower. She is my companion. All these years I have been silenced and dumb, and now I have one to talk to that understands what a white man feels!

"She is a white woman. Some of the best blood of Scotland runs in her veins. She's a Cranston. Match her wi' his lordship's daughter there, the daughter of the grocer. Match her wi' the whitest lilies of them all, and my girl will outshine them in beauty,

aye, and outwear them in courage and steadfastness! And she's worthy to bear sons and daughters in turn that any man might be proud to father!"

He came to a full stop. Jack sat up, scowling fiercely, and looking five years younger by reason of his sheepishness. What he had to say came out in jerks. "It's damn hard to get it out," he stuttered. "I'm sorry. I'm ashamed of myself. What else can I say? I swear to you I'll never lay a finger of disrespect on her. For heaven's sake go, and let me be by myself!"

Cranston promptly rose. "Spoken like a man, my lad," he said laconically. "I'll say no more. Good-night to ye." He strode away.

## IV

## THE CONJUROR

MORNING breaks, one awakes refreshed and quiescent, and, wondering a little at the heats and disturbances of the day before, makes a fresh start. Mary was not to be seen about the fort, and Jack presently learned that she and Davy had departed on horseback at daybreak for the Indian camp at Swan Lake. He was relieved, for, after what had happened, the thought of having to meet Mary and adjust himself to a new footing made him uncomfortable.

Jack's self-love had received a serious blow, and he secretly longed for something to rehabilitate himself in his own eyes. At the same time he was not moved by any animosity toward Cranston, the instrument of his downfall; on the contrary, though he could not have explained it, he felt decidedly drawn toward the grim trader, and after a while he sheepishly entered the store in search of him. He found Cranston quite as diffident as himself, quite as anxious to let bygones be bygones. There was genuine warmth in his handclasp.

They made common cause in deriding the gubernatorial party.

"Lord love ye!" said Cranston. "Never was an outfit like to that! Card-tables, mind ye, and folding chairs, and hanging lamps, and a son-of-a-gun of a big oil-stove that burns blue blazes! Fancy accommodating that to a horse's back! I've sent out to round up all the company horses. They'll need half a regiment to carry that stuff."

"What's the governor's game up here?" asked Jack.

"You've got me," said Cranston. "Coal lands in the canyon, he says."

"That's pretty thin," said Jack. "It doesn't need a blooming governor and his train to look at a a bit of coal. There's plenty of coal nearer home."

"There's a piece about it in one of the papers the steamboat brought," said Cranston.

He found the place, and exhibited it to Jack, who read a fulsome account of how his honour Sir Bryson Trangmar had decided to spend the summer vacation of the legislature in touring the North of the province, with a view of looking into its natural resources; that the journey had been hastily determined upon, and was to be of a strictly non-official character, hence there were to be no ceremonies en route beyond the civilities extended to any private traveller; that this was only one more example of the democratic tendencies of our popular governor, etc.

"Natural resources," quoted Jack. "That's the ring in the cake!"

"You think the coal they're after has a yellow shine?" suggested Cranston.

Jack nodded. "Even a governor may catch that fever," he said. "By Gad!" he cried suddenly, "do you remember those two claim-salters — Beckford and Rowe their names were — who went out after the ice last May?"

"They stopped here," said Cranston. "I remember them."

"What if those two ——" suggested Jack.

"Good Lord!" cried Cranston, "the governor himself!"

"If it's true," cried Jack, "it's the richest thing that ever happened! A hundred years from now they'll still be telling the story around the fires and splitting their sides over it. It's like Beckford, too; he was a humourist in his way. This is too good to miss. I believe I'll go back with them."

From discussing Sir Bryson's object they passed to Jack's own work in the Spirit River Pass. No better evidence of the progress these two had made in friendship could be had than Jack's willingness to tell Cranston of his "strike," the secret that a man guards closer than his crimes.

"I don't mind telling you that I have three good claims staked out," said Jack. "In case I should be stopped from filing them, I'll leave you a full description before I go. I'll leave you my little bag of dust too, to keep for me."

"You're serious about going back with them, then?" said Cranston.

Jack nodded. "I ought to go, anyway, to make sure they don't blanket anything of mine."

In due course Jack produced his little canvas bag, which the trader sealed, weighed, and receipted for.

"There's another thing I wanted to talk to you about," said Jack diffidently. "I can't hold these three claims myself. I want you to take one."

"Me?" exclaimed Cranston in great astonishment.

"Yes," stammered Jack, still more embarrassed. "For — for her, you know — Mary. I feel that I owe it to her. I want her to have it, anyway. She needn't know it came from me. It's a good claim."

Cranston would not hear of it, and they argued hotly.

"You're standing in your own daughter's light," said Jack at last. "I'm not giving you anything. It's for her. You haven't any right to deprive her of a good thing."

Cranston was silenced by this line; they finally shook hands on it, and turned with mutual relief to less embarrassing subjects. Jack had the comfortable sensation that in a measure he had squared himself with himself.

"Who's running the governor's camp?" asked Jack.

"They brought up Jean Paul Ascota from the Crossing."

"So!" said Jack, considerably interested. "The

conjuror and medicine man, eh? I hear great tales of him from all the tribes. What is he?"

Cranston exhibited no love for the man under discussion. "His father and mother were half-breed Crees," he said. "He has a little place at the Crossing where he lives alone — he never married — but most of the time he is tripping; long hikes from Abittibi to the Skeena, and from the edge of the farming country clear to Herschel Island in the Arctic, generally alone. Too much business, and too mysterious for an Indian, I say. He's a strong man in his way, he has a certain power, you wouldn't overlook him in a crowd; but I doubt if he's up to any good. He's one of those natives that plays double, you know them, a white man wi' white men, and a red wi' the reds. Much too smooth and plausible for my taste. Lately he has got religion, and he goes around wi' a Bible in his pocket, which is plumb ridiculous, knowing what you and I know about his conjuring practices among the tribes."

"I've heard he's a good tripper," said Jack.

"Oh, none better," said Cranston. "I'll say that for him; there's no man knows the whole country like he does, or a better hand in a canoe, or with horses, or around the camp. But, look you, after all he's only an Indian. Here he's been with these people a week, and already his head is turned. They don't know what they're doing, so they defer to him in everything, and consequently the Indian's head is

that swelled wi' giving orders to white men his feet can hardly keep the ground. Their camp is at a standstill."

"Hm!" said Jack; "it's a childish outfit, isn't it? It would be a kind of charity to take them in hand."

A little later Jack ran into the redoubtable Jean Paul Ascota himself, whom he immediately recognized from Cranston's description. As the trader had intimated, there was something strongly individual and peculiar in the aspect of the half-breed. He was a handsome man of forty-odd years, not above the average in height, but very broad and strong, and with regular, aquiline features. Though Cranston had said he was half-bred, there was no sign of the admixture of any white blood in his coppery skin, his straight black hair, and his savage, inscrutable eyes. He was dressed in a neatly fitting suit of black, and he wore "outside" shoes instead of the invariable moccasins. This ministerial habit was relieved by a fine blue shirt with a rolling collar and a red tie, and the whole was completed by the usual expensive felt hat with flaring, stiff brim. A Testament peeped out of one side-pocket.

But it was the strange look of his eyes that set the man apart, a still, rapt look, a shine as from close-hidden fires. They were savage, ecstatic, contemptuous eyes. When he looked at you, you had the feeling that there was a veil dropped between you, invisible to you, but engrossed with cabalistic symbols that he was studying while he appeared to be looking at

you. In all this there was a certain amount of affectation. You could not deny the man's force, but there was something childish too in the egregious vanity which was perfectly evident.

He was sitting on a box in the midst of the camp disarray, smoking calmly, the only idle figure in sight. Tents, poles, and miscellaneous camp impedimenta were strewn on one side of the trail; on the other the deck-hands were piling the stores of the party. Sidney Vassall, with his inventory, assisted by Baldwin Ferrie, both in a state approaching distraction, were pawing over the boxes and bundles, searching for innumerable lost articles, that were lost again as soon as they were found.

Vassall was not a particularly sympathetic figure to Jack, but the sight of the white men stewing while the Indian loafed was too much for his Anglo-Saxon sense of the fitness of things. His choler promptly rose, and, drawing Vassall aside, he said:

"Look here, why do you let that beggar impose on you like this? You'll never be able to manage him if you knuckle down now."

Vassall was a typical A. D. C. from the provinces, much better fitted to a waxed floor than the field. The hero of a hundred drawing-rooms made rather a pathetic figure in his shapeless, many-pocketed "sporting" suit. His much-admired manner of indiscriminate, enthusiastic amiability seemed to have lost its potency up here.

"What can I do?" he said helplessly. "He says he can't work himself, or he won't be able to boss the Indians that are coming."

"Rubbish!" said Jack. "Everybody has to work on the trail. I'll put him to work for you. Show me how the tents go."

Vassall gratefully explained the arrangement. There was a square tent in the centre, with three smaller A-tents opening off. Jack measured the ground and drove the stakes. Then spreading the canvas on the ground, preparatory to raising it, he called cheerfully:

"Lend a hand here, Jean Paul. You hold up the poles while I pull the ropes."

The half-breed looked at him with cool, slow insolence, and dropping his eyes to his pipe, pressed the tobacco in the bowl with a delicate finger. He caught his hands around his knee, and leaned back with the expression of one enjoying a recondite joke.

Jack's face reddened. Promptly dropping the canvas, he strode toward the half-breed, his hands clenching as he went.

"Look here, you damned redskin!" he said, not too loud. "If you can't hear a civil request, I've a fist to back it up, understand? You get to work, quick, or I'll knock your head off!"

The native deck hands stopped dead to see what would happen. Out of the blue sky the thunderbolt of a crisis had fallen. Jean Paul, the object of their unbounded fear and respect, they invested with super-

natural powers, and they looked to see the white man annihilated.

The breed slowly raised his eyes again, but this time they could not quite meet the blazing blue ones. There was a pregnant pause. Finally Jean Paul got up with a shrug of bravado, and followed Jack back to the tents. He was beaten without a blow on either side. A breath of astonishment escaped the other natives. Jean Paul heard it, and the iron entered his soul. The glance he bent on Jack's back glittered with the cold malignancy of a poisonous snake. It was all over in a few seconds and the course of the events for weeks to come was decided, a course involving, at the last, madness, murder, and suicide.

On the face of it the work proceeded smartly, and by lunch time the tents were raised, the furniture and the baggage stowed within, and Vassall's vexatious inventory checked complete. His effusive gratitude made Jack uncomfortable. Jack cut him short, and nonchalantly returned to his own camp, where he cooked his dinner and ate it alone.

Afterward, cleaning his gun by the fire, he reviewed the crowded events of the past twenty-four hours in the ever-delightful, off-hand, cocksure fashion of youth that the oldsters envy, while they smile at it. His glancing thoughts ran something like this:

"To be put to sleep like that! Damn! But I couldn't see what I was doing. If it hadn't been dark! . . . At any rate, nobody knows. It's

good he didn't black my eye. Cranston'll never tell. He's a square old head all right. I suppose it was coming to me. Damn! . . . I like Cranston, though. He's making up to me now. He'd like me to marry the girl. She'd take me quick enough. Nice little thing, too. Fine eyes! But marriage! Not on your cartridge-belt! Not for Jack Chanty! The world is too full of sport. I haven't nearly had my fill! . . . The governor's daughter! Rather a little strawberry, too. Professional angler. I know 'em. Got a whole bookful of fancy flies for men. Casts them prettily one after another till you rise, then plop! into her basket with the other dead fish. You'll never get me on your hook, little sister. . . I can play a little myself. If you let on you don't care, with that kind, it drives 'em wild. . . . Shouldn't wonder if she had old Frank going. . . . Rum start, meeting him up here. What a scared look he gave me. I wonder! . . . He's changed. . . . Very likely it's politics, and graft, and getting on in the world. Doesn't want to associate too closely with a tough like me, now. . . . Oh, very well! These big-bugs can't put me out of face. I can show them a thing or two. . . . I put that Indian down in good shape. I have the trick of it. He's a queer one. They'll have trouble with him later. Women with them, too. Hell of an outfit to come up here, anyway." . . .

Jack's meditations were interrupted by Frank

Garrod, who came threading his way through the poplar saplings. Jack sprang up with a gladness only a little less hearty than upon their first meeting the night before.

"Hello, old fel'!" he cried. "Glad you looked me up! We can talk off here by ourselves."

But it appeared that Frank had come only for the purpose of carrying Jack back with him. Sir Bryson had expressed a wish to thank him for his assistance that morning. Jack frowned, and promptly declined the honour, but upon second thought he changed his mind. There was a plan growing in his head which necessitated a talk with Sir Bryson.

They made their way back together, Frank making an unhappy attempt to appear at his ease. He had something on his mind. He started to speak, faltered, and fell silent. But it troubled him still. Finally it came out.

"I say," he said in his jerky way, "as long as you want to keep your real name quiet, we had better not let on that we are old friends, eh?"

Jack looked at him quickly, all his enthusiasm of friendliness dying down.

"We can seem to become good friends by degrees," Garrod went on lamely. "It need only be a matter of a few days."

"Just as you like," said Jack coolly.

"But it's you I'm thinking of."

"You needn't," said Jack. "I don't care what people call me. You needn't be afraid that I'll trouble you with my society."

"You don't understand," Garrod murmured miserably.

However, in merely bringing the matter up he had accomplished his purpose, for Jack never acted quite the same to him afterward.

A little to one side of the tents they came upon a group of finished worldliness such as had never before been seen about Fort Cheever. From afar, the younger Cranston boys stared at it awestruck. Miss Trangmar and her companion sat in two of the folding chairs, basking in the sun, while Vassall and Baldwin Ferrie reclined on the grass at their feet, the former, his day's work behind him, now clad in impeccable flannels. The centre of the picture was naturally the little beauty, looking in her purple summer dress as desirable, as fragile, and as expensive as an orchid. At the sight of her Jack's nostrils expanded a little in spite of himself. Lovely ladies who metamorphosed themselves every day, not to speak of several times a day, were novel to him.

As the two men made to enter the main tent she called in her sweet, high voice: "Present our benefactor, Mr. Garrod."

Garrod brought Jack to her. Garrod was very much confused. "I —— I" — he stammered, looking imploringly at Jack.

"They call me Jack Chanty," Jack said quietly, with his air of "take it or leave it."

"Miss Trangmar, Mrs. Worsley," Garrod murmured looking relieved.

Jack bowed stiffly.

"We are tremendously obliged," the little lady said, making her eyes big with gratitude. "Captain Vassall says he would never have got through without you."

A murmur of assent went round the circle. Jack would not out of sheer obstinacy make the polite and obvious reply. He looked at the elder lady. He liked her looks. She reminded him of an outspoken cousin of his boyhood. She was plain of feature and humorous-looking, very well dressed, and with an air of high tolerance for human failings.

"In pleasing Miss Trangmar you put us all under heavy obligations," said Baldwin Ferrie with a simper. He was a well-meaning little man.

"By Jove! yes," added Vassall; "when she's overcast we're all in shadow."

Everybody laughed agreeably.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Linda Trangmar, "one would think I had a fearful temper, and kept you all in fear of your lives!"

There was a chorus of disclaimers. Jack felt slightly nauseated. He looked away. The girl stole a wistful glance at his scornful profile, the plume of fair hair, the cold blue eyes, the resolute mouth. All

of a sudden she had become conscious of the fulsome atmosphere, too. She wondered what secrets the proud youthful mask concealed. She wondered if there was a woman for whom the mask was dropped, and if she were prettier than herself.

Meanwhile Jack felt as if he were acting like a booby, standing there. He was impelled to say something, anything, to show them he was not overcome by their assured worldliness. He addressed himself to Vassall.

"You have had no trouble with the Indian, since?"

"None whatever," Vassall said. "He's gone off now with some of the people here."

Garrod took advantage of the next lull to say: "Sir Bryson is waiting for us."

Jack bowed again, and made a good retreat.

"I told you he was a gentleman," said Linda to Mrs. Worsley.

That lady had been impressed with the same fact, but she said cautiously, as became a chaperon: "His manner is rather brusque."

"But he *has* manner," remarked Linda slyly.

"We know nothing about him, my dear."

"That's just it," said Linda. "Fancy meeting a real mystery in these matter-of-fact days. I shall find out his right name."

"They say it's not polite to ask questions about a man's past in this country," suggested Vassall with a playful air.

"Nor safe," put in Mrs. Worsley.

"Who cares for safety?" cried Linda. "I came North for adventures, and I mean to have them! Isn't he handsome?" she added wickedly.

The two men assented without enthusiasm.

Within the main tent Sir Bryson was seated at a table, looking the very pink of official propriety. There were several piles of legal documents and miscellaneous papers before him, with which he appeared to be busily occupied. It was noticeable that his chief concern was to have the piles arranged with mathematical precision. He never finished shaking and patting them straight. At first he ignored Jack. Handing some papers to Garrod, he said:

"These are now ready to be sent, Mr. Garrod. Please bear in mind my various instructions concerning them."

Garrod retired to another table. He proceeded to fold and enclose the various documents, but from the tense poise of his head it was clear that he followed all that was said.

Sir Bryson now affected to become aware of Jack's presence with a little start. He looked him up and down as one might regard a fine horse he was called on to admire. "So this is the young man who was of so much assistance to us this morning?" he said with a smile of heavy benignity.

Jack suppressed an inclination to laugh in his face.

"We are very much obliged to you, young sir—very," said Sir Bryson grandly.

"It was nothing, sir," said Jack, smiling suddenly. He knew if he caught Garrod's eye he would burst out laughing.

"I now desire to ask you some questions relative to the big canyon," continued Sir Bryson. "I am told you know it."

"I have just come from there," said Jack.

"Is there a good trail?"

"I came by water. But I know the trail. It is well-travelled. There are no muskegs, and the crossings are easy."

"You know the canyon well?"

"I have been working above it for three months."

Sir Bryson favoured Jack with a beady glance. "Um!" he said. And then suddenly: "Are you free for the next month or so?"

Garrod raised his eyes with a terrified look.

"That depends," said Jack.

"Are you prepared to consider an offer to guide our party?"

Garrod bit his lips to keep back the protest that sprang to them.

"If it is sufficiently attractive," said Jack coolly.

Sir Bryson opened his eyes. "Three dollars a day, and everything found," he said sharply.

Jack smiled, and shook his head. "That is the ordinary pay of a white man in this country," he

said. "This is a responsible job. I'd expect five at least."

Sir Bryson made a face of horror. "Out of the question!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not at all anxious for it at any price," said Jack. "It will be difficult. You are very badly provided —— "

"We have everything!" cried Sir Bryson.

"Except necessities," said Jack. "Moreover, men should have been engaged in advance, good packers, boatmen, axemen. We can't get good material on the spur of the moment, and I have no wish to be blamed for what goes wrong by others' doing."

Sir Bryson puffed out his cheeks. "You take a good deal on yourself, young man," he said heatedly. "Let me ask you a few questions now if you please. What is your name?"

"I am known throughout the country as Jack Chanty."

"But your real name."

"I do not care to give it."

A long breath escaped slowly from between Garrod's clenched teeth, and he wiped his face.

The little governor swelled like a pouter pigeon. "Tut!" he exclaimed. "This is preposterous. Do you think I would entrust myself and my party to a nameless nobody from nowhere?"

Sir Bryson, pleased with the sound of this phrase, glanced over at Garrod for approval.

"I'm not after the job, Sir Bryson," said Jack coolly. "You opened the matter. I am known throughout the country. Ask Cranston."

Garrod, seeing his chief about to weaken, could no longer hold his peace. "Wouldn't it be as well to let the matter go over?" he suggested casually.

Sir Bryson turned on him very much annoyed. "Mr. Garrod, by your leave," he said crushingly. "I was about to make the suggestion myself. That will be all just now," he added to Jack.

Jack sauntered away to talk the matter over with Cranston.

Sir Bryson spoke his mind warmly to his secretary concerning the latter's interference. Garrod, however, relieved of Jack's presence, recovered a measure of sang-froid.

"I'm sorry," he said smoothly, "but I couldn't stand by and listen to the young ruffian browbeat you."

"Browbeat nothing," said the irate little governor. "Bargaining is bargaining! He stands out for as much as he can."

Garrod turned pale. "You're surely not thinking of engaging him!" he said.

"There's no one else," said Sir Bryson.

"But he's more insolent than the Indian," said Garrod nervously. "And who is he? what is he? Some nameless fugitive from justice!"

"You overlook the fact that he doesn't care whether

I engage him or not," said Sir Bryson. "Our assurance lies in that."

"A shallow pretence," cried Garrod.

Sir Bryson turned squarely in his chair. "You seem to be strangely set against hiring this fellow," he said curiously.

Garrod was effectually silenced. With a gesture, he went on with his work.

Later he sought out Jack again. They sat on a bench at the edge of the bank, and Garrod suffered himself to answer some painful questions first, in order that he might not appear to be too eager to broach the subject that agitated his mind.

At last he said with an assumed heartiness in which there was something very painful to see: "I tell you it did me good to hear you giving the old man what for this afternoon. He leads me a dog's life!"

"Oh, that was only in the way of a dicker," said Jack carelessly. "He expected it. Any one could see he loves a bargain."

"Don't let yourself in for this one," said Garrod earnestly. "You'll repent it if you do. He'll interfere all the time, and insist on his own way, then blame you when things go wrong."

"The trouble with you is you're in awe of him because he's the Big Chief outside," said Jack. "That doesn't go up here."

"Then you mean to come?" faltered Garrod.

"If he accepts my terms," said Jack. "I don't mean to let myself go too cheap."

Garrod's head drooped. "Well — don't say I didn't warn you," he said in an odd, flat tone.

## V

## JACK HEARS ABOUT HIMSELF

JACK was subsequently engaged as chief guide to Sir Bryson's party. Days of strenuous preparation succeeded. For one thing the stores of the expedition had to undergo a rigid weeding-out process; the oil-stove, the bedsteads, the white flannels, and the parasols, etc., were left behind. There was a shortage of flour and bacon, which the store at Fort Cheever was in poor shape to supply. Last winter's grub was almost exhausted, and this winter's supply had not arrived. The Indians, who are the store's only customers, live off the land during the summer. Cranston stripped himself of what he had, and sent a messenger down the river with an urgent order for more to be sent up by the next boat.

Jack was hampered by a lack of support from his own party. Vassall and Baldwin Ferrie were willing enough but incapable. Garrod blew hot and cold, and altogether acted in a manner inexplicable to Jack. Only the man's obvious suffering prevented the two from coming to an open quarrel. Jack dismissed him with a contemptuous shrug. The little governor issued and countermanded his orders bewilderingly

and any malcontent was always sure of a hearing from him. But Jean Paul Ascota, from whom Jack had most reason to expect mischief-making, gave him no trouble at all. This in itself might have warned him of danger, but he had too many other things to think about.

It cannot be said that Jack bore all his hindrances with exemplary patience. However, he had an effective weapon in his unconcern. When matters came to a deadlock he laughed, and, retiring to his own little camp, occupied himself with his banjo until some one came after him with an olive branch. They were absolutely dependent on him.

On the eighth day they finally got away. Mounting his horse, Jack took up a position on a little mound by the trail, and watched his company file past. For himself he had neglected none of the stage-trappings dear to the artistic sense of a young man. His horse was the best in the company and the best accoutred.

He had secured a pair of shaggy bearskin chaps and from his belt hung a gigantic .44 in a holster. He wore a dashing broad-brimmed "Stetson," and a gay silk handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat. The sight of him sitting there, hand on hip, with his scornful air, affected little Linda Trangmar like a slight stab. She bit her lip, called herself a fool, and spurred ahead.

Jean Paul Ascota rode at the head of the procession. Jack had seen the wisdom of propitiating him with

this empty honour. The Indian had likewise seen to it that he obtained a good horse, and he rode like a careless Centaur. Passing Jack, his face was as blank as paper, but out of Jack's range of vision the black eyes narrowed balefully, the wide nostrils dilated, and the lips were tightly compressed.

Sir Bryson's party followed: the spruce little governor, an incongruous figure on his sorry cayuse; the two ladies, Garrod, Vassall, and Baldwin Ferrie. At the very start Sir Bryson objected to riding at the tail of Jean Paul's horse, and Jack was obliged to explain to him that there are certain rules of the trail which even a lieutenant-governor may not override. The place at the head belongs to him who can best follow or make a trail.

The two ladies wore khaki divided skirts that they had been obliged to contrive for themselves, since side-saddles are unknown in the country. In regard to Miss Trangmar and Mrs. Worsley, Jack had strongly urged that they be left at Fort Cheever, and in this matter Garrod had almost desperately supported him, volunteering to stay behind to look after them. His activity booted him nothing with his little mistress. When she heard of the suggestion she merely smiled and waited until she got her father alone. As a result here they were.

There was one more white member of the expedition of whom some explanation must be given: this was Thomas Jull, lately cook on the steamboat, and now

transferred to the position of camp cook. The whole design of the journey had been threatened with extinction at Fort Cheever by the discovery that a cook had been forgotten. There was of course nothing of that kind to be obtained at the fort. Jull's cooking had all been done on stoves, but Jack, promising to initiate him into the mysteries of campfires, had tempted him to forsake his snug berth.

He was a fat, pale, and puffy creature of indeterminate age, who looked as if his growth had been forced in a cellar, but he was of a simple, willing nature, and he had conceived an enormous admiration for Jack, who was so different from himself. He had already acquired a nickname in the country from his habit of carrying his big head as if in momentary expectation of a blow. Humpy Jull he was to be henceforth.

Four Indian lads completed the party. This was barely sufficient to pack the horses and make camp, but as Jack had explained to Sir Bryson the best he could get were a poor lot, totally unaccustomed to any discipline, and a larger number of them would only have invited trouble. They must be worked hard, and kept under close subjection to the whites, he said. There were twenty laden horses, and five spare animals.

They climbed the steep high hill behind Fort Cheever and Jack, watching the train wind up before him, thrilled a little with satisfaction under his mask of careless hardihood. Notwithstanding all his pre-

liminary difficulties, it was a businesslike-looking outfit. Besides, it is not given to many young men in their twenties to command a lieutenant-governor.

This was not really a hill, but the river-bank proper. From the top of it the prairie stretched back as far as the eye could reach, green as an emerald sea at this season, and starred with flowers. Here and there in the broad expanse grew coverts of poplar saplings and wolf-willow, making a parklike effect. The well-beaten trail mounted the smooth billows, and dipped into the troughs of the grassy sea like an endless brown ribbon spreading before them.

The progress of such a party is very slow. The laden pack-horses cannot be induced to travel above a slow, slow walk. Twice a day they must be unladen and turned out to forage; then caught and carefully packed again. On the first day a good deal of confusion attended these operations. Little by little Jack brought order out of chaos.

As the pack-train got under way after the first "spell" on the prairie, Jack, not generally so observant of such things, was struck by the look of weariness and pain in Garrod's white face. It was the face of a man whose nerves have reached the point of snapping. Jack did not see as far as that, but: "The old boy's in a bad way," he thought, with a return of his old kindness. After all, as youths, these two had been inseparable.

"I say, wait behind and ride with me," he said to

Garrod. "We've scarcely had a chance to say anything to each other."

Garrod's start and the wild roll of his black eyes suggested nothing but terror at the idea, but there was no reasonable excuse he could offer. They rode side by side in the grass at some distance behind the last Indian.

"Do you know," said Jack, "I've never heard a word from home since the night I cleared out five years ago. Tell me everything that's happened."

"That's a large — a large order," stammered Garrod. "So many little things. I forget them. Nothing important. I left Montreal myself soon after you did."

"Why did you never answer my letter?" asked Jack. "You know I had no one to write to but you."

"I never got a letter," said Garrod quickly.

"That's funny," said Jack. "Letters don't often go astray."

"Don't you believe me?" demanded Garrod sharply.

Jack stared. "Why, sure!" he said. "What's biting you? You're in a rotten state of nerves," he went on. "Better chuck the life you're leading, and stay up here for a year or two. What's the matter with you?"

Garrod passed the back of his hand across his weary eyes. "Can't sleep," he muttered.

"Never heard of a man up here that couldn't do

his eight hours a night," said Jack. "You'd better stay."

Garrod made no answer.

"You're not still hitting the old pace?" asked Jack.

Garrod shook his head.

"Gad! what a pair of young fools we were! Trying to cut a dash on bank-clerks' salaries! That girl did me a mighty good turn without meaning it when she chucked me for the millionaire. What's become of her, Frank?"

"She married him," Garrod said; "ruined him, divorced him, and married another millionaire."

Jack laughed carelessly. "Logical, eh? And that was what I broke my young heart over! Remember the night I said good-bye to you in the Bonaventure station, and blubbered like a kid? I said my life was over, 'member? — and I wasn't twenty-one yet. You were damn decent to me, Frank. You didn't laugh."

Garrod kept his head averted. His lips were very white.

"We went through quite a lot for a pair of kids," Jack went on. "We always stood by each other, though we were such idiots in other respects. What we needed was a good birching. It takes a year or two of working up here to put an only son straight with himself. Life is simple and natural up here; you're bound to see the right of things. Better stay, and get your health back, old man."

Garrod merely shook his head again.

"My uncle is dead," Jack went on. "I saw it in a paper."

"Yes," said Garrod.

"And left his pile to a blooming hospital! That's what I lost for clearing out, I suppose. Well, I don't regret it — much. That is, not the money. But I'm sorry the old boy passed out with a grouch against me. I thought he would understand. He had a square head. I've often thought there must have been something else. You were quite a favourite of his, Frank. Was there anything else?"

All this time Garrod had not looked at Jack. At the last question a wild and impatient look flashed in his sick eyes as if some power of endurance had snapped within him. He jerked his head toward the other man with desperate speech on his lips. It was never uttered, for at the same moment an exclamation broke from Jack, and clapping heels to his horse, he sprang ahead. One of the packs had slipped, and the animal that bore it was sitting in the trail like a dog.

After the pack had been readjusted, other things intervened, Garrod regained his own place in the procession, and Jack for the time being forgot that his question had not been answered.

Jack's dignity as the commander of the party often sat heavily upon him, and he was fond of dropping far behind in the trail, where he could loll in the saddle, and sing and whistle to his heart's ease. His spirits

always rose when he was on the move, and the sun was shining.

Jack had a great store of old English ballads. On one such occasion he was informing high heaven of the merits of "Fair Hebe," when upon coming around a poplar bluff he was astonished to see Linda Trangmar standing beside her horse, listening with a smile of pretty malice. She had a bunch of pink flowers that she had gathered. Jack sharply called in the song, and blushed to his ears.

"Don't stop," she said. "What did Reason tell you about Fair Hebe?"

Jack made believe not to hear. Our hero hated to be made fun of. "It's dangerous to be left behind by the outfit," he said stiffly.

"I knew you were coming," she said coolly. "Besides, I got off to pick these flowers, and I couldn't get on again without being helped." She thrust the flowers in her belt. "Aren't they lovely? Like crushed strawberries. What are they called?"

"Painter's brush," said Jack laconically.

He lifted her on her horse. She was very light. It was difficult to believe that this pale and pretty little thing was a woman grown. She had a directness of speech that was only saved from downright impudence by her pretty childishness.

"Now we can talk," she said as they started their horses. "The truth is, I stayed behind on purpose to talk to you. I wish to make friends."

Jack, not knowing exactly what to say, said nothing.

She darted an appraising look at him. "Mr. Vassall says it's dangerous to ask a man questions about himself up here," she went on. "But I want to ask you you some questions. May I? Do you mind?"

This was accompanied by a dazzling smile. Jack slowly grew red again. He hated himself for being put out of countenance by her impudence, nevertheless it cast him up high and dry.

She took his assent for granted. "In the first place, about your name," she chattered; "what am I to call you? Mr. Chanty would be ridiculous, and without the Mister it's too familiar."

"You don't have to bother about a handle to my name," he said. "Call me Jack, just as you speak to Jean Paul or Charlbogin, or any of the men about camp."

"That's different," she said. "I do not call Mr. Garrod, Frank, nor Captain Vassall, Sidney. You can make believe what you choose, but I know you are my kind of person. If you are a Canadian, I'm sure we know heaps and heaps of the same people."

Jack began to find himself. "If you insist on a respectable name call me Mr. 'Awkins," he said lightly.

"Pshaw! Is that the best you can invent?" she said.

It was a long time since Jack had played conversational battledore and shuttlecock. He found he

liked it rather. "'Awkins is an honorable name," he said. "There's Sir 'Awkeye 'Awkins of 'Awkwood 'All, not to speak of 'Enery 'Awkins and Liza that everybody knows about. And over on this side there's Happy Hawkins. All relatives of mine."

The girl approved him because he played the foolish game without grinning foolishly, like most men. Indeed his lip still curled. "You do not resemble the 'Awkinses I have known," she said.

It appeared from this that the little lady could flatter men as well as queen it over them. Jack was sensible that he was being flattered, and being human, he found it not unpleasant. At the same time he was determined not to satisfy her curiosity.

"Sorry," he said. "For your sake I wish I would lay claim to Montmorenci or Featherstonehaugh. But 'Awkins is my name and 'umble is my station. I don't know any of the Vere de Veres, the Cholmondeleys or the Silligers here in Canada, only the toughs."

She did not laugh. Abandoning the direct line, she asked: "What do you do up here regularly?"

"Nothing regularly," he said with a smile. "A little of everything irregularly. I have horses across the mountains, and I make my living by packing freight to the trading posts, or for surveyors or private parties, wherever horses are needed. When I get a little ahead of the game like everybody else, I do a bit of prospecting. I have an eye on one or two things ——"

"Gold?" she said with shining eyes. "Where?"

"That would be telling," said Jack, flicking his pony.

"Do you know anybody in Toronto?" she asked suddenly.

He smiled at her abrupt return to the main issue, and shook his head.

"In Montreal?"

His face changed a little. After a moment he said slyly: "I met a fellow across the mountains who was from Montreal."

"A gentleman?"

"More or less."

"What was his name?" she demanded.

"Malcolm Piers."

She looked at him with round eyes. "How exciting!" she cried.

"Exciting?" said Jack, very much taken aback.

"Why, yes," she said. "There can't be more than one by that name. It must have been Malcolm Piers the absconder."

Her last word had much the effect of a bomb explosion under Jack's horse. The animal reared violently, almost falling back on his rider. Linda was not sufficiently experienced on horseback to see that Jack's hand had spasmodically given the cruel Western bit a tremendous tug. The horse plunged and violently shook his head to free himself of the pain. When he finally came back to earth, the actions of the horse seemed sufficient to account for the sudden grimness

of Jack's expression. His upper lip had disappeared, leaving only a thin, hard line.

"Goodness!" said Linda nervously. "These horses are unexpected."

"What did you call him?" asked Jack quietly.

"Absconder," she said innocently. "Malcolm Piers was the boy who stole five thousand dollars from the Bank of Canada, and was never heard of afterward. He was only twenty."

He looked at her stupidly. "Five thousand dollars!" he repeated more than once. "Why that's ridiculous!"

"Oh, no," she said eagerly. "Everybody knows the story. He disappeared, and so did the money. I heard all the particulars at the time, because my room-mate at Havergal was the sister of the girl they said he did it for. She wasn't to blame, poor thing. She proved that she had sent him about his business before it happened. She married a millionaire afterward. She's had heaps of trouble."

Jack's horse fretted and danced, and no answer was required of him.

"Fancy your meeting him," she said excitingly. "Do tell me about him. They said he was terribly good-looking. Was he?"

"Don't ask me," said Jack gruffly. "I'm no judge of a man's looks." He scarcely knew what he was saying. The terrible word rang in his head with a clangour as of blows on naked iron "Absconder!"

"Do tell me about him," she repeated. "Criminals are so deadly interesting! When they're gentlemen. I mean. And he was so young!"

"You said everybody knows what he did," said Jack dully. "I never heard of it."

"I meant everybody in our world," she said. "It never got in the newspapers of course. Malcolm Piers's uncle was a director in the bank, and he made the shortage good. He died a year or so afterward, leaving everything to a hospital. If Malcolm Piers had only waited a little while he wouldn't have had to steal the money."

"Then he would have been a millionaire, too," said Jack, with a start of harsh laughter.

She didn't understand the allusion. She favoured him with a sharp glance. "Funny he should have told you his real name."

"Why not?" said Jack abstractedly. "He didn't consider that he had done any wrong!"

How ardently Jack wished her away so that he could think it out by himself. Little by little it was becoming clear to him, as if revealed by the baleful light of a flame. So that was why his uncle had cut him off? And Garrod had not answered his question. Garrod knew all about it. Garrod was the only person in the world who knew in advance that he had been going to clear out, never to return. Garrod was deep in debt at the time. Garrod had access to the bank's vault. This explained his strange, wild agitation at

the time of their first meeting, and his actions ever since.

"What's become of him now?" Linda desired to know. She had to ask twice.

Jack heard her as from a great distance. He shrugged. "You can't keep track of men up here."

"Did he tell you his story?"

He nodded. "It was different from yours," he said grimly.

"Tell me."

"It is true that he was infatuated with a certain girl ——"

"Yes, Amy ——"

"Oh, never mind her name! It was difficult for him to keep up the pace she and her friends set, but she led him on. Finally she made up her mind that an old man with money was a better gamble than a young one with prospects only, and she coolly threw him over. It broke him all up. He was fool enough to love her. Everything he had known up to that time became hateful to him. So he lit out. But he took nothing with him. Indeed, he stripped himself of every cent, sold even his clothes to pay his debts around town before he went. He came West on an emigrant car. Out here he rode for his grub, he sold goods behind a counter, he even polished glasses behind a bar, until he got his head above water."

This was a long speech for Jack, and in delivering

it he was betrayed into a dangerous heat. The girl watched him with a sparkle of mischievous excitement.

"A likely story," she said, tossing her head. "I know that old Mr. McInnes had to put up the money, and that he altered his will." She smiled provokingly. "Besides, it's much more interesting to think that Malcolm Piers took the money. Don't rob me of my favourite criminal."

Jack looked at her with his handsome brows drawn close together. Her flippancy sounded incredible to him. He hated her at that moment.

A horseman dropped out of his place in the train ahead and came trotting back toward them? It was Garrod. Seeing him, a deep, ugly red suffused Jack's neck and face, and a vein on his forehead stood out. But he screwed down the clamps of his self-control. Pride would not allow him to betray the secrets of his heart to the light-headed little girl who was angling for them. They were riding around another little poplar wood.

"Look!" he said in as near his natural voice as he could contrive. "In the shade the painter's brush grows yellow. Shall I get you some of those?"

"No, thank you," she said inattentively. "I like the others best. Tell me about Malcolm Piers ——"

Garrod was now upon them. His harassed eye showed a new pain. He looked at Linda Trangmar with a dog's anxiety, and from her to Jack. Jack

looked abroad over the prairie with his lips pursed up. His face was very red.

"Oh, Mr. Garrod, what do you think!" cried the girl. "This man met Malcolm Piers across the mountains. The boy who absconded from the Bank of Canada, you know. You used to know him, didn't you?"

There was a pause, dreadful to the two men.

"Oh, the little fool! The little fool!" thought Jack. Out of sheer mercifulness he kept his head averted from Garrod.

"What's the matter?" he heard her say sharply. "Help him!" she said to Jack.

This was too much. Making sure only that Garrod was able to keep his saddle, Jack muttered something about having to speak to Jean Paul, and rode away. His anger was swallowed up a pitying disgust. His passing glance into Garrod's face had revealed a depth of despair that it seemed unfair, shameful, he — the man's enemy — should be allowed to see.

## VI

## THE PRICE OF SLEEP

THEY camped for the night on a grassy terrace at the edge of a deep coulee in the prairie, through which a wasted stream made its way over a bed of round stones toward the big river. The only full-sized trees they had seen all day grew in the bottom of the coulee, which was so deep that nothing of the branches showed over the edge.

The horses were herded together, and unpacked in a wide circle. Each pack and saddle under its own cover was left in its place in the circle, against loading in the morning. As fast as unpacked the horses were turned out to fill themselves with the rich buffalo grass. The old mares who had mothered most of the bunch were hobbled and belled to keep the band together.

Jack, Jean Paul, and the Indian lads saw to the horses. Jack also directed Vassall's and Baldwin Ferrie's inexpert efforts with the tents, and between times he showed Humpy Jull how to make a fire.

Sir Bryson, Linda, and Mrs. Worsley, in three of the folding chairs which were the object of so much comment in the country, looked on at all this.

"I feel so useless," said Linda, following Jack's diverse activities, without appearing to. "Don't you suppose there is something we could do, Kate?"

"It all seems like such heavy work, dear," said Mrs. Worsley.

Sir Bryson, folding his hands upon his comfortable centre, beamed indulgently on the busy scene. "Nonsense, Linda," he said. "They are all paid for their exertions. You do not concern yourself with household matters at home."

"This is different," said Linda, a little sulkily. She was sorry she had spoken, but Sir Bryson would not let the matter drop so easily.

"How different?" he inquired.

"Oh! up here things seem to fall away from you," said Linda vaguely. "You get down to rock bottom."

"Your metaphors are mixed, my dear," said Sir Bryson pleasantly. "I don't understand you."

"It doesn't matter," she said indifferently.

"Now, for my part, I think this the most agreeable sight in the world," Sir Bryson went on. "All these people working to make us comfortable, and dinner coming on presently. It rests me. Fancy seeing one's dinner cooked before one's eyes. I hope Jull has washed his hands. I didn't see him do it."

Sir Bryson had no intention of making a joke, but Mrs. Worsley laughed.

"Speaking of dinner," continued Sir Bryson, "I hope there won't be any awkwardness about our guide."

"Jack Chanty?" said Linda quickly. "What about him?"

"My dear! I wish you wouldn't be so free with his vulgar name! Do you suppose he will expect to sit down with us?"

"Why not?" said Linda warmly. "It's the custom of the country. The whites eat together, and the Indians. Can't you see that things are different up here? There are no social distinctions."

"Then it is high time we introduced them," said Sir Bryson with the indulgent smile of one who closes the matter. "I shall ask Mr. Garrod to drop him a hint."

"You'll only make yourself ridiculous if you do," said Linda.

Mrs. Worsley spoke but seldom, and then to some purpose. She said now: "Do you know, I think the matter will probably adjust itself if we leave it alone."

And she was right. Nothing was further from Jack's desires than to sit down with the party in the big tent. Apart from other considerations he knew which side his bread was buttered on, and he chummed with the cook. Jack and Humpy slung their little tents side by side behind the fire, and Jack waited to eat with Humpy after the others were through.

It was Humpy Jull's début as a waiter, and Sir Bryson was thereby likewise provided with a new experience. Humpy was very willing and good-natured. He was naturally a little flustered on this occasion,

and with him it took the form of an increased flow of speech. To his simplicity, waiting on the table obligated him to play the host.

"Walk in, people," he said genially. "Sit down anywheres. You'll have to excuse me if I don't do things proper. I ain't had no experience at the table with ladies. I never did have no face, anyway. A child could put me out."

Sir Bryson became turkey red, and looked at his aide-de-camp. Vassall made believe not to see.

"I'll just set everything on the table," Humpy went on innocently, "and you dip right in for yourselves. The bannock ain't quite what it ought to be. I didn't have the time. When we get a settled camp I'll show you something better."

"How far have we made to-day?" Sir Bryson asked pointedly of Vassall to create a diversion.

Humpy took the answer upon himself. "Eighteen miles, Governor," he said. "We would have stopped at Mooseberry Spring two miles back, but Jack said there was no firewood thereabout. So we're late to-night."

"We have everything, thank you," said Sir Bryson icily. "You needn't wait."

"I don't mind, Governor," said Humpy heartily. "Jack and me ain't going to eat till you are through. I want to make sure you folks gets your fill."

"I think the bannock is very good, Mr. Jull," said Linda wickedly. "The raisins are so nice."

"I had 'em and I thought I might as well put 'em in," said Humpy, highly pleased. "Some finds it hard to make good baking-powder bannock, but it come natural to me. Jack, he baked it for me."

Sir Bryson ceased eating. It was Jack who prevented an explosion. Possibly suspecting what was going on within the tent, he called Humpy. Linda pricked up her ears at the sound.

Humpy ducked for the door. "If there's anything you want don't be afraid to sing out, Governor," he said.

Sir Bryson slowly resumed his normal colour. He made no reference to what had happened except to say severely: "Belinda, I'm surprised at you!"

"Oh! don't be stuffy, father," returned his daughter, inelegantly.

The members of Sir Bryson's suite were accustomed to these little passages.

When they issued from the tent Jack Chanty and Humpy were to be seen supping cheek by jowl beside the fire, and Linda said with a flash of intuition:

"I'll be bound, they're having a better supper than we had!"

She was only guessing, but as a matter of fact, in the case of a party as large as this, there are bound to be tidbits, such as a prairie-chicken, a fish or a rabbit, not sufficient to furnish the general table, and these naturally fall to the share of the cook and his chum.

Afterward, while the Indians washed the dishes

Jack smoked and Humpy talked. Humpy was the kind of innocent braggart that tells tall tales about nothing at all. He was grateful to Jack for even the appearance of listening, and Jack in turn was glad of the prattle that enabled him to keep his face while he thought his own thoughts.

"Last winter when the steamboat was laid up," said Humpy Jull, "I was teaming for the company down to Fort Ochre. Say, it's wild country around there. The fellers advised me not to leave my gun behind when I druv into the bush for poles. One day I was eatin' my lunch on a log in the bush when I hear a grizzily bear growl, right behind me. Yes, sir, a ding-gasted grizzily. I didn't see him. I didn't wait. I knew it was a grizzily bear because the fellers say them's the on'y kind that growls-like. Say, my skin crawled on me like insec's walkin' on my bare bones. I never stop runnin' till I get back to the fort. The hosses come in by themselves. Oh, I let'em laugh. I tell you I wa'n't takin' no chances with a grizzily!"

Meanwhile Jack, for the first time in his life, was obliged to face a moral crisis. Other threatening crises hitherto he had managed to evade with youth's characteristic ingenuity in side-stepping the disagreeable. The first time that a young brain is held up in its happy-go-lucky career, and forced to think, is bound to be a painful experience.

Up to now Jack had taken his good name for granted.

He had run away when he felt like it, meaning to go back when he was ready. Now, when he found it smirched he realized what an important thing a good name was. He raged in his mind, and justly at the man who had destroyed it; nevertheless a small voice whispered to him that it was partly his own fault. For the first time, too, he realized that his name was not his exclusive property; his father and mother had a share in it, though they were no longer of the world. He thought too of the streets of the city that was so dear to him, now filled with people who believed that Malcolm Piers was a thief.

The simplest thing was not to think about it at all, but go direct to Frank Garrod, and "have it out" with him. But Jack was obliged to recognize that this was no solution. Every time he had drawn near to Frank since the afternoon, Frank had cringed and shown his fangs like a sick animal, disgusting Jack, and making it impossible for him to speak to Frank in any connection. A look in Frank's desperate eyes was enough to show the futility of an appeal to his better feelings. "Besides, I couldn't beg him to set me right," Jack thought, his hands clenching, and the vein on his forehead swelling.

Force then suggested itself as the only recourse, and the natural one to Jack's direct nature. This was no good either. "He's a sick man," Jack thought. "He couldn't stand up to me. If I struck him ——" A cold fear touched his heart at the thought that he

had no way in the world of proving himself honest, except by means of a free and voluntary statement from a man who was obviously breaking, and even now scarcely sane.

The problem was too difficult for Jack to solve. He found himself wishing for an older head to put it to. More than once his thoughts turned to the wiser and older lady in Sir Bryson's party, to whom he had not yet spoken. "I wish I could make friends with her," he thought.

The second day on the trail was largely a repetition of the first. The routine of making and breaking camp proceeded more smoothly, that was all. On this day as they rose over and descended the endless shallow hills of the prairie, the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies rose into view off to the west.

Jack and Frank Garrod held no communication throughout the day. Garrod showed an increased disorder in his dress, and a more furtive manner. On the trail there were no secretarial duties to perform, and he kept out of the way of the other white members of the party. He had always been considered queer, and his increased queerness passed unnoticed except by Jack, who held the clue, and by Jean Paul Ascota. The half-breed watched Jack, watched Garrod, and drew his own conclusions.

Jean Paul on the face of things was turning out an

admirable servant, capable, industrious, and respectful. The white men, including Jack, would have been greatly astonished could they have heard the substance of his low-voiced talk to the Indian lads around their own fire.

"I held my hand," he said in Cree, "because the time is not come to strike. One must suffer much and be patient for the cause. But I have not forgotten. Before I am through with him, Jack shall be kicked out of camp, and then he shall die. My medicine works slowly, but it is very sure.

"Jack is only one white man," he went on. With an ignorant, easily swayed, savage audience Jean Paul was superb in his effect of quiet intensity. "I will not let him spoil my plans against the race. The time is almost ripe now. I have visited the great tribe of the Blackfeet in the south. They are as many as the round stones in the bars when the big river is low. I have talked with the head men. They are ready. I have visited the Sarcees, the Stonies, the Bloods, and the Piegans; all are ready when I give the word. And are we not ready in the North, too? the Crees, the Beavers, the Sapis, the Kakisas, and all the peoples across the mountain. When Ascota sends out his messengers a fire shall sweep across the country that will consume every white man to soft ashes!"

Thus it went night after night. The four lads listened scowling, a hot sense of the wrongs of the red race

burning in each breast. But it was like a fire in the grass, blazing up only to expire. They fell asleep and forgot all about it until Jean Paul talked again. Perhaps they sensed somehow that Jean Paul talked to them largely for the satisfaction he got out of his own eloquence.

To-night Jean Paul was watching Garrod. By and by Garrod wandered away from the campfires, and Jean Paul followed. Garrod mooned aimlessly around the tents with his head sunk on his breast, zigzagging to and fro in the grass, flinging himself down, only to get up and walk again. For a long time Jean Paul watched and followed him, crouching in the grass in the semi-darkness. Finally Garrod sat down at the edge of the coulee, and Jean Paul approached him openly.

"Fine night," he said with an off-hand air.

Garrod murmured an indistinguishable reply.

"Me, I lak' to walk in the night the same as you," Jean Paul went on in a voice indescribably smooth and insinuating. He sat beside the other man. "I lak' sit by one black hole lak' this and look. It is so deep! You feel bad?" he added.

"My head," murmured Garrod. "It gives me no rest."

"Um!" said Jean Paul. "I cure you. With my people I what you call doctor."

"Doctors can't do me any good," Garrod muttered.

"Me, I not the same lak' other doctors," said Jean

Paul calmly. "First, I tell you what's the matter. Your body not sick; it's your, what you call, your soul."

Garrod looked at him with a start.

Jean Paul lowered his voice. "You hate!" he hissed.

"What damn nonsense is this?" said Garrod tremblingly.

"What's the use to make believe?" said Jean Paul with a shrug. "I doctor — conjuror they call me. I know. You know what I know."

Garrod weakened. "Know what?" he said. "How do you know?"

"I know because same way I hate," said Jean Paul softly.

Garrod breathed fast.

"Shall we put our hates together?" murmured Jean Paul.

But there was still life in Garrod's pride of race. "This is foolishness," he said contemptuously. "You're talking wild."

Jean Paul shrugged. "Ver' good," he said. "You know to-morrow or some day. There is plentee time."

"Keep out of my way," said Garrod. "I don't want to have anything to say to you."

The darkness swallowed Jean Paul's smile. He murmured velvetly: "Me, I t'ink you lak' ver' moch sleep to-night. Sleep all night."

Garrod partly broke down. "Oh, my God!" he murmured, dropping his head on his knees.

"You got your pipe?" asked Jean Paul. "Give me, and I fill it."

"What with?" demanded Garrod.

"A little weed I pick," said Jean Paul. "No hurt anybody."

"Here," said Garrod handing over his pipe with a jerk of bitter laughter; "if it does for me, so much the better!"

Jean Paul drew a little buckskin bag from an inner pocket, and filled the pipe with herb leaves that crackled as he pressed them into the bowl. Handing it back, he struck a match. Garrod puffed with an air of bravado, and a subtle, pungent odour spread around.

"It has a rotten taste," said Garrod.

"You do not smoke that for taste," said Jean Paul.

For several minutes nothing was said. Garrod nursed the pipe, taking the smoke with deeper, slower inhalations.

"That's good," he murmured at length. There was unspeakable relief, relaxation, ease, in his voice.

Jean Paul watched him narrowly. Garrod's figure slowly drooped, and the hand that carried the pipe to his mouth became uncertain.

"You got enough," said Jean Paul suddenly. "Come along. You can't sleep here."

Garrod protested sleepily, but the half-breed jerked him to his feet, and supporting him under one arm, directed his wavering, spastic footsteps back to the

tents. Garrod shared a small tent with Vassall and Baldwin Ferrie. One end opened to the general, tent, the other was accessible from outdoors. Jean Paul looked in; it was empty, and the flap on the inner side was down. In the big tent they were playing cards.

Garrod collapsed in a heap. Jean Paul deftly undressed him, and, rolling him in his blanket, left him dead to the world. Before leaving the tent he carefully knocked the ashes out of the pipe, and dropped it in the pocket of Garrod's coat. Immediately afterward Jean Paul in his neat black habit showed himself in the light of the fire. Sitting, he was seen to gravely adjust a pair of rimmed spectacles (his eyes were like a lynx's!) and apply himself to his daily chapter of the Testament before turning in.

In the morning Garrod awoke with a splitting head and a bad taste in his mouth. However, that seemed a small price to pay for nine hours of blessed forgetfulness.

There followed another day of prairie travel. Sir Bryson, when he wished to communicate with Jack, made Garrod his emissary, so that the two were obliged to meet and talk. On the approach of Garrod, Jack merely sucked in his lip, and stuck closely to the business of the day. These meetings were dreadful to Garrod. Only an indication of what he went through can be given. In the condition he was in he had to avoid the sharp-eyed Linda, and he was obliged to stand aside and see her ride off with Jack out of sight

of the rest of the train. By nightfall his nerves were in strings again.

On this night after supper Jean Paul took pains to avoid him. Garrod was finally obliged to go to the Indians' fire after him.

"Look here, Jean Paul, I want to speak to you," he said sullenly.

Jean Paul, closing the book and taking off the spectacles with great deliberation, followed Garrod out of earshot of the others.

"I say give me another pipeful of that dope, Jean Paul," Garrod said in a conciliatory tone.

The half-breed had dropped his smooth air. "Ha! You come after it to-night," he sneered.

"Hang it! I'll pay you for it," snarled Garrod.

"My medicine not for sale," replied Jean Paul.

"Medicine?" sneered Garrod. "I'll give you five dollars for the little bagful."

Jean Paul shook his head.

"Ten! Twenty, then!"

Jean Paul merely smiled.

A white man could not possibly humble himself any further to a redskin. Garrod, with a miserable attempt at bravado, shrugged and turned away. Jean Paul stood looking after him, smiling. Garrod had not taken five paces before a fresh realization of the horrors of the night to come turned his pride to water. He came swiftly back.

"You said you were a doctor," he said in a breaking

voice. "Good God! can't you see what it means to me! I've got to have it! I've got to have it! I can't live through another night without sleep!"

"Las' night you tol' me to kip away from you," drawled Jean Paul.

"Forget it, Jean Paul," begged Garrod. "I'll give you all the money I have for it. A pipeful for God's sake!"

Jean Paul continued to smile, and, turning, went back to the fire, and took out his Testament.

Garrod *did* live through the night, and the day that followed, but at the approach of another night, white man as he was, he delivered himself over to Jean Paul Ascota, the half-breed, body and soul.

## VII

## AN EMOTIONAL CRISIS

TOWARD the end of the fourth day the pack-train wound down a hill to Fort Geikie, and they saw the great river again, that they had been following all the way, but at some distance from the bank. Fort Geikie was no more than a couple of log shacks maintained during the winters as an outpost for trading with the Indians. At present the shacks were boarded up, and the Indians ranging away to the north and the west.

The prairie came to an abrupt end here, and immediately before them rose the steep foothills, with the mountains proper looking over their heads behind. Around a point off to the left the river issued foaming from between grim, hewn walls of rock. Up and down river it was called significantly, "Hell's Back door." "Hell's Opening," it followed, was at the other end of the canyon. For upward of twenty miles between the river roared down in unchecked fury, grinding the drift-logs to shreds.

The log shacks stood in the middle of another grassy esplanade, but here elevated high above the river. The party camped on the edge of the steep bank, with

a lovely prospect visible from the tent openings. The river was swifter and much narrower here; far below them lay a thin island, and beyond, the river stretched away like a broad silver ribbon among its hills, the whole mellowed and glowing in the late sunshine.

As soon as the horses were turned out Jack made his way to Sir Bryson.

The governor led him into the tent. "Well?" he said, seating himself, and carefully matching his finger-tips.

"My instructions were to take you to the big canyon," said Jack. "Here we are at the lower end of it. Do you want to make a permanent camp here, or to push farther on?"

"Let me see," said Sir Bryson. Producing a paper from his pocket, he spread it on the table. Jack saw that it was a handmade map. "The lower end of the canyon," he repeated to himself. "That will be here," and he put his finger on a spot.

Jack's natural impulse was to walk around the table, and look at the map over Sir Bryson's shoulder. As he did so, Sir Bryson snatched it up, and held it against his breast like a child whose toy is threatened by another child.

Jack, with a reddening face, retired around the table again. "I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "I didn't know it was private."

Sir Bryson reddened too, and murmured something indistinguishable.

Suddenly it came to Jack that he had seen the map before, and a smile twitched the corners of his lips. Since Sir Bryson wished to make a great secret of it, all right — he, Jack, was not obliged to tell all he knew.

Sir Bryson did not see the smile. He was studying the map again. "How far is it to the top of the canyon?" he asked.

"Twelve miles," said Jack. "The trail, as you see, cuts across a bend."

"Is there a good place to camp?"

"Better than here. First-rate water, grass, and wood."

"Can we cross the river if we wish to?"

"There are any number of boats cached along the shore. Everybody bound downstream has to leave his boat there."

"Very well," said Sir Bryson. "Let's move on to-morrow."

When Jack joined Humpy Jull he said briefly: "I was right. The old boy is travelling by Beckford and Rowe's map."

"Did you tell him what they were?" asked Humpy, all agog.

"No," said Jack coolly. "He wouldn't have thanked me. He'll find it out himself in a couple of days."

"The nerve of it," said Humpy, tremendously impressed, "to play the governor himself for a sucker! There'll be the deuce to pay when it all comes out!"

It was impossible for Jack's spirits to remain per-

manently depressed. To-night, after a long silence, the banjo and the insinuating baritone were heard for a while by the fire. At the sound, Linda, in the big tent, changed colour. The ladies still dressed for dinner as far as they could, and Linda, with her elaborate hair arrangement, the pearls in her ears, and the rings on her fingers, made an odd urban figure to be here on the lonely plains.

Her attention wandered, and finally she committed the capital crime of bridge.

"You've revoked!" cried Sir Bryson aghast, "when the game and the rubber were ours!"

She was not much cast down by her parent's reproaches. "Kate, take my hand," she said cajolingly. "I've no head for the game to-night."

They changed places, and Linda carried her chair outside the door of the tent. The cook-fire was only some twenty paces distant, and she saw Jack in his favourite attitude, the small of his back supported against a log, and the banjo across his thighs. The admiring Humpy Jull sat on the other and of the log, whittling a stick.

Jack saw her come out, and he felt the call that she sent him. He drew in his upper lip a little, and stayed where he was. He would have been glad enough to go of his own volition, but the hint of coercion made him stubborn. Linda was finally obliged to retire beaten.

Next morning the pack-train climbed the steep hill that barred the way, traversed the ancient portage

around the canyon, and finally camped beside the river again in a little clearing that has been a camping-place since before the white men found America. Looking across to the left, a smooth wall of rock seemed to bar the river's progress; an ominous hoarse roar issued from its foot. All around them rose moderate mountain heights green to their summits; farther upstream were the first-class peaks.

After lunch a riding-party to High Rock, down the canyon, was talked about. Long afterward Jack remembered that it had first been suggested by Jean Paul, who volunteered to put the camp in order while they were away. All the whites set out except Humpy Jull. Garrod accompanied the others.

A change had come over Garrod, a comfortable daze taking the place of the wild, harassed look in his eyes. He rode apparently without seeing or caring where. He and Jean Paul had ridden together all morning, and it was observable that the white's man eyes followed all the movements of the Indian in a mechanical way. The two were rapidly becoming inseparable. No thought of danger to himself from this connection occurred to Jack. By this time he had forgotten the scene at Fort Cheever.

They first visited "Hell's Opening" on foot, having to climb over a tangle of great trunks cast high on the rocks by the freshets. One of the great sights of earth rewarded them. The mighty river, a thousand feet wide above, plunged through a cleft in the rock that

a child could have tossed a stone across, and, pent within its close, dark walls, swept down with a deep, throaty roar.

The beholders remarked upon it according to their several natures.

"Very pretty," said Sir Bryson. "Let's get on."

"By Jove!" said Sidney Vassall.

"Tertiary rocks of the Cambrian period," said Baldwin Ferrie, or whatever they were.

Garrod looked with lack-lustre eyes, and said nothing.

Linda looked at Jack. Seeing that he was genuinely moved by the sight, familiar as it was to him, she began to enthuse. It sounded overdone to Jack, and he turned on his heel.

Mrs. Worsley looked at it with shining eyes, and said nothing.

As they rode on it commenced to rain softly, and Sir Bryson was for returning. His daughter opposed him, and all the others rallied to her support. Garrod in particular, though he seemed to have no interest by the way, was dead set against giving up the expedition. They rode through a magnificent, untouched forest. The cool gloom, the slow drip of the leaves, and the delicious fragrance of the wet greenery created an effect the impressionable ones in the party were not soon to forget. Sir Bryson grumbled.

In one of the various rearrangements of the party Jack found that Mrs. Worsley was riding next behind

him. Swinging around, he talked to her, hanging sideways over his saddle.

"No one has passed this way this year," he said, glancing at the trail.

"I don't see how you know the path at all," she returned. "I can see nothing."

Jack explained the blazes on the trees. "Beyond the next creek I blazed a trail myself last year," he said. "The old trail was too steep for white men's horses."

"You know the country well."

"I feel as if this bit was my own," he said, with a look around.

Crossing a little stream he pointed out the remains of a sluice and cradle, and explained their uses to her. "Joe Casey had his camp on that little hill two years ago," he said.

"What luck did he have?" she asked.

Jack shook his head. "But we all know the stuff's somewhere about," he said.

Kate Worsley was able in turn to tell Jack something about the showy plants they passed, and a bird or two. Jack's knowledge of the flora and fauna was limited strictly to what would serve a man for fuel or food.

"I believe this life would suit you, too," he said, approving her strongly.

"I believe it would," she said with a smile, "if there was any place for such as I."

"You would soon make a place," he said.

Linda, following Mrs. Worsley in the trail, wondered jealously why Jack never unbent with her like that.

Though they were never out of hearing of its thunderous voice, they had no sight of the canyon again until they suddenly issued out on the High Rock, five miles from camp. A superb view arrested them. The trail came out on a flat, overhanging table rock two hundred feet above the water. The spot was in the middle of a wide bend in the walls of the canyon, and they could therefore see both up and down, over the ragged white torrent in the bottom.

This was their destination. To dismount they had to cross the rock to a stretch of grass beyond. They instinctively lingered first for a look. Jack, Mrs. Worsley, Linda, Vassall, Sir Bryson, and Baldwin Ferrie lined up in that order, taking care to hold their horses in a safe eight or ten feet back from the naked edge. Looking down river afforded the finest prospect; here the steep, brown walls fell back a little, and in the middle of the torrent rose a tall rock island, like a tower, crowned with noble spruce trees.

Garrod, who had dropped behind the others, now came out from among the trees on to the flat rock. His horse appeared to be fretting.

"Better dismount and lead him across," Jack flung over his shoulder.

If Jack had looked squarely at Garrod the look in the man's eyes would surely have caused him to draw

back himself and dismount. But he was intent at the moment in pointing out a seam of coal in the face of the rock opposite.

None of them could ever tell exactly what happened after that. Garrod did not dismount, but attempted to ride across behind the others through the narrow space between their horses and the thickly growing trees. Jack was sitting loose in his saddle with an arm extended. Suddenly his horse shrank and quivered beneath him. With a snort of pain and terror the animal sprang forward, reared on the edge of the rock, attempted desperately to turn on his hind legs — and, with his rider, disappeared.

They heard breaking branches below, and a moment later a dull crash on the rocks far beneath. No sound escaped from any member of the party. The awful silhouette of the rearing horse on the edge of nothing had frozen them into grotesque attitudes of horror, and they looked at the empty place as if they saw it still. Finally Vassall swore in a strange, soft voice, and Sir Bryson began to babble. Their horses, infected by the terror of their riders, suddenly turned of one accord, and shouldered each other off the rock to the grassy terrace at one side. Garrod slipped out of his saddle and lay inert. The horses that followed jumped over his body.

One by one the others half-rolled, half-slipped out of their saddles. Linda Trangmar was the first to reach the ground, and it was she who crawled back over the

rock like a lithe little animal, and looked over the hideous edge. She saw that several spruce trees grew out obliquely from a ledge beneath the rock, and that horse and rider had fallen through the tops of these. Far below she saw the lump of dead horseflesh on the rocks. It had struck, and rolled down a steep incline to the water's edge.

The three men watched her, trembling and helpless. Sir Bryson's legs failed him, and he sat abruptly in the grass. Kate Worsley crawled toward Linda on her hands and knees, and attempted to draw her back.

"Come away, come away," she whispered. "It's too horrible!"

"Let me be!" said Linda sharply. "I haven't found him yet!"

Suddenly a piercing scream broke from Linda. Kate, by main force, snatched her back from the edge of the rock.

"He's safe!" cried Linda. She clung to Kate, weeping and laughing together.

They thought it was merely hysteria. Vassall, extending his body on the rock, looked over. He got up again, and shook his head.

High Rock was the highest point of the cliff on the side where they stood. The stretch of grass where the horses were now quietly feeding inclined gently down from the flat table.

"There he is!" screamed Linda, pointing.

Following the direction of her finger, they saw Jack's

head and shoulders rise above the edge of the grass. Pulling himself up, he came toward them. He sat in the grass and wiped his face. He was terribly shaken, but he would never confess it. His pallor he could not control. All this had occurred in less than a minute.

The men gathered around him, their questions tumbling out on each other.

"I am not hurt," said Jack, steadying his speech word by word. "I slipped out of the saddle as we went over, and I caught a spruce tree. I had only to climb down the trunk and walk along the ledge to the grass."

Their questions disconcerted him. He got up, and coolly throwing himself down at the edge of the rock, looked over.

"Come back! Come back!" moaned Linda.

"Poor brute!" Jack said, turning away.

As he came back, Linda, straining away from Kate's encircling arms, bent imploring eyes on him. Jack looked at her and stopped. Instead of the worldly little coquette he had thought her up to now, he saw a woman offering him her soul through her eyes. The sight disturbed and thrilled him. It came at a moment of high emotional tension. He gave her his eyes back again, and for moments their glances embraced, careless of the others around. Had it not been for Kate's tight clasp, Linda would have cast herself into his arms on the spot.

"What could have startled your horse?" Sir Bryson asked for the dozenth time, breaking the spell.

Jack shrugged. "Where's Garrod?" he said suddenly.

Garrod had completely passed out of their minds. They found him lying in the grass a little to one side. He had fainted. It provided a distraction to their shaken nerves, and gradually a measure of calmness returned to them all. Kate Worsley and Vassall worked over Garrod. Jack, who felt a strong repugnance to touching him, rode back for water to the last stream they had crossed.

When Garrod returned to consciousness the shock to his confused faculties of seeing Jack standing in front of him, and his mingled remorse and relief, were all very painful to see. He babbled explanations, apologies, self-accusations; none of them could make out what it all amounted to.

"Don't," said Jack turning away. "I don't blame you. I should have made everybody dismount at once. It was my own fault."

At the time he honestly believed it.

It was a very much sobered procession that wound back to camp. As they climbed the side of one of the steep gullies, leading their horses, Jack and Linda found themselves together.

"I tell you, it gives you a queer start to fall through space," said Jack with a grim smile. "I never lived so fast in my life. Down below I saw every separate

stone that was waiting to smash me. And in that one second before I grabbed the tree I remembered everything that had happened to me since I was a baby."

"Don't talk about it," she murmured, turning away her head. At the same time a little spring of gladness welled in her breast, for it was the first time that he had ever dropped his guard with her.

"Do you care?" he said, off-hand. "I thought you were the kind that didn't."

She flashed a look at him. "Would you have me the same to everybody?" she said.

He lifted her on her horse in the way that had suggested itself to him as most natural. It was not according to the fashionable conventions of riding, but Linda liked it. Her hand fell on his round, hard shoulder under the flannel shirt, and she bore upon it heavier than she need. They rode on with beating hearts, avoiding each other's eyes.

It signified only that their combined ages made something less than fifty, and that each was highly pleasing in the eyes of the other sex. His scornful air had piqued her from the first, and he had seen her hard eyes soften for him at a high-pitched moment. Young people would be saved a deal of trouble if the romantic idea were not so assiduously inculcated that these feelings are irrevocable.

In camp after supper they found each other again.

"Too bad about the mosquitoes," said Jack a little sheepishly.

"Why?" she asked, making the big eyes of innocence.

"There's no place we can go."

"Let's sit under your mosquito bar."

Jack gasped a little, and looked at her with side-long eyes. True, his tent had no front to it and the firelight illumined every corner, still it was a man's abode. Linda herself conceived a lively picture of the consternation of Sir Bryson and his suite if they knew, but they were good for an hour or more at the card-table, and, anyway, this was the kind of young lady that opposition, even in prospect, drives headlong.

"Humpy Jull will chaperon us," she said demurely. "You can sing to me."

"All right," he said.

Linda sat in the middle of the tent, with a man on either hand, and the fire glowing before them. Jack reclined on the end of his spine as usual, with the banjo in his lap. The spirit of at least one of his hearers was lifted up on the simple airs he sung. An instinct prompted him to avoid the obviously sentimental.

> "Exact to appointment I went to the grove
> To meet my fair Phillis and tell tales of love;
> But judge of my anguish, my rage and despair,
> When I found on arrival no Phillis was there."

Between songs Linda, in the immemorial way of women, made conversation with the man of the two present in which she was not interested.

"Don't you like to look for pictures in the fire, Mr. Jull?"

"Sure, I like to look at pitchers," returned Humpy innocently. "But there ain't never no pitchers in camp. I like the move-'em pitchers best. When I was out to the Landing last year I used to go ev'y night."

Jack was partly hidden from Humpy by Linda. Tempted by the hand that lay on the ground beside him, he caught it up and pressed it to his lips. When he sang again, the same hand, while its owner looked innocently ahead of her, groped for and found his curly head. At the touch of it Jack's voice trembled richly in his throat.

When she thought the rubber of rubbers would be nearing its end Linda made Jack take her back. Walking across the narrow space their shoulders pressed warmly together. They walked very slowly.

"I ought to have told you my name," murmured Jack uncomfortably.

"I know it, Malcolm, dear," she breathed.

"Who told you?" he demanded, greatly astonished.

She twined her fingers inside his. "I guessed, silly."

"Well, I didn't take the money," he said.

"I don't care if you did," she murmured.

"But I didn't," he said frowning.

"All right," she said, unconvinced and uncaring.

"What are we going to do?" he said.

"Oh, don't begin that," she said swiftly. "This is to-night, and we're together. Isn't that enough?"

They had reached the tents. Of one accord they



"Tempted by the hand that lay on the ground beside him, he caught it up and pressed it to his lips"

turned aside, and in the shadow of the canvas she came naturally into his arms, and he kissed her, thrilling deliciously. The delicate fragrance of her enraptured his senses. It was light love, lightly sealed.

"Kiss me again," she murmured on her deepest note. "Kiss me often, and don't bother about the future!"

## VIII

## THE FEMININE EQUATION

JACK turned in filled with a nagging sense of discomfort. He felt dimly that he ought to have been happy, but it was very clear that he was not. It was all very well for her to say: "Don't bother about the future," but his stubborn mind was not to be so easily satisfied. It was true he had not committed himself in so many words, but with girls of Linda's kind he supposed a kiss was final. So the future had to be considered. It was now more than ever imperative that his name be cleared. She didn't seem to care much whether he were honest or not. There was the rub. He scowled, and rolled over to woo sleep on the other side.

In the end he fell asleep, and dreamed a fantastic dream. He was King David, wearing a long gray beard and a white gown. He was at sea in a motor-sailboat of extraordinary construction, having a high, ornate cabin, over which the boom had to be lifted whenever they came about. There was a beturbaned lascar at the tiller, whom he, King David, treated with great contumely. Linda was along, too, also clad in biblical costume with a silver band around her

brow. She was strangely meek, and she plucked continually at his sleeve.

A great storm came up; the waves tossed, the boat was knocked about, and he couldn't get a spark in his engine. He suspected that the lascar knew much better than he what to do, but out of sheer, kingly wilfulness he went contrary to everything the brown man suggested. Nor would he heed the insistent plucking at his sleeve.

Then suddenly a mermaid uprose bedside the boat, and the sea was miraculously stilled. Her long, black, silky hair hung before her face, and streamed over her deep bosom and her lovely arms. All would be well if he could but distinguish her face, he felt. He leaned farther and farther over the rail, while the fretful plucking at his sleeve continued. He implored the mermaid to push back her hair.

Then he awoke. Some one *was* pulling at his sleeve, and a voice was whispering: "Jack, wake up!"

He sprang to a sitting position, throwing out his arms. They closed around a bony little frame encased in a rough coat. He recoiled.

"It's only me," said the small voice.

The fire had burned down to dull embers, and Jack at first could see nothing. "Who are you?" he demanded.

'Davy Cranston."

"Davy Cranston?" repeated Jack. It was a moment or two before his dream-muddled brain conceived the identity that went under this name. "What

does this mean? What do you want? How did you get here?" he demanded in great surprise.

"It was Mary said we had to come," the boy replied abashed.

The girl's name had the effect of ringing a bell in Jack's understanding. "Mary? Where is she?" he asked quickly.

"We're camped up on the bench," the boy replied. "She's waiting for us. Come to our camp, and we can talk."

Jack was ready in a moment, and they set off. The afterglow was under the north star, and by that Jack knew it was midnight. The camp was wrapped in perfect stillness. When they got clear, and began to climb the trail, a little fiery eye beckoned them ahead.

In answer to Jack's further questions the boy could only reply that "Mary had a warning," which only heightened the questioner's wonder and curiosity.

The camp was pitched on the edge of the low bench above the river-flat, and they saw her, from a little distance, crouching by the fire that made a little crimson glory under the branches. She was listening with bent head to hear if there was one pair of footsteps approaching or two. Behind her the two little A-tents were pitched side by side, their open doors like mouths yawning in the firelight

As they came within radius of the light she lifted her face, and Jack without knowing why he should be, was staggered by the look in her deep eyes, an

indescribable look, suggesting pain proudly borne, and present gladness.

"You're all right?" she murmured, searching for what she might read in his face.

"Surely!" said Jack wonderingly. Further speech failed him. The sight of her threw him into a great uneasiness that he was at a loss to account for. She was nothing to him, he told himself a little angrily. But he could not keep his eyes off her. She had changed. She looked as if her spirit had travelled a long way these few days and learned many difficult lessons on the road. She had an effect on him as of something he had never seen before, yet something he had been waiting for without knowing it. And this was only Mary Cranston that he thought he knew!

"There was a danger," she said quietly. "I did not know if we would be in time to save — to help you."

"Danger? Save me?" Jack repeated, looking at her stupidly. "Good God! How did you know that?" he presently added.

Mary's agitation broke through her self-contained air. To hide it she hastily busied herself picking up the dishes, and packing them in the grub-box. Fastening the box with its leather hasp, she carried it into her tent. She did not immediately reappear.

"Where have you come from?" Jack demanded of Davy.

"Swan Lake."

"Have you been there ever since you left the fort?"

The boy nodded. "Tom Moosehorn's three children got the measles," he explained. "They are pitching at Swan Lake. Tom came to the fort to ask my father for medicine, and when Mary heard that his children were sick, she said she would go and nurse them, because Tom's wife is a foolish squaw, and don't know what to do for sickness. And I went to take care of Mary."

"Where is Swan Lake?" asked Jack.

"Northwest of the fort, two days' journey," said Davy. "We were there a week, and then the kids got well. On the way back home Mary had a warning. She said she felt a danger threatening you." Shyness overcame the boy here. "You — you were friendly to us," he stammered. "So we wanted to come to you. We didn't know where you were, but Mary said the warning came from the south, so we left the trail, and hit straight across the prairie till we came to the river trail. There we found your tracks, and followed them here."

"A warning!" said Jack, amazed. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," the boy said simply. "Mary has them."

Mary returned to the fire with a composed face. All three of the youngsters were embarrassed for speech. How could they find words to fit the strange feelings that agitated them.

Jack, gazing at Mary's graceful pose, on her knees

by the fire, suddenly exclaimed: "Why, it was you, all the time!"

"What was?" asked Mary.

"The mermaid."

"What's a mermaid?" Davy wanted to know.

Mary answered before Jack could. "An imaginary creature, half woman, half fish."

"Why, how did you know?" asked Jack unthinkingly.

"Do you think I know nothing?" she said, with the ghost of a smile.

He had the grace to redden.

They made Jack tell them his dream. They laughed, and the tension was relieved. They were all grateful for something else to talk about. There was one thing in the dream that Jack left out.

"Who was the woman who kept pulling at your sleeve?" asked Mary.

Jack lied. "Nobody I know," he said lightly. "One of King David's five hundred wives, I suppose."

Davy laughed, but Mary looked affronted. "You're confusing David with Solomon," she said coldly.

Jack looked at her uneasily. This was she whom he had dismissed merely as one of the girls of the country!

"And he sat up and hugged me as if I was a girl," Davy put in with relish.

Jack and Mary looked away from each other and blushed, but for different reasons.

They could not long keep away from the subject

that filled their minds. "Blest if I can understand it," murmured Jack.

They knew to what he referred. "Nobody can," said Mary.

"You must have had this warning several days ago."

"Three days," said Mary.

"Nothing happened to me three days ago. Nothing until to-day ——"

"Ah!" she said sharply.

"That was an accident," said Jack. "My horse shied on High Rock, and jumped over the ledge. I caught on a tree."

Mary's eyes brooded over him, and her hands went to still her breast. "Was there any one behind you?" she asked quickly.

"Yes, Garrod."

"Perhaps it was no accident."

Jack stared at the fire. "Perhaps not," he said slowly. After a while he added. "Still I don't understand."

"Many of the people have such warnings," Mary said quietly.

Jack frowned. "You are not a savage," he said.

"We are one fourth Indian," Mary said with a kind of relentless pride. "It is silly to make-believe that we're not."

Jack went on to tell them in detail what had happened during the day, suppressing, however, all that related to Linda. One thing led to another; he could

hardly have explained how it came about, but Mary's eyes drew out what he had believed was locked deep in his heart, the story of his early days, and of Garrod's treachery that he had just found out. Sister and brother had little to say to the story, but their shining eyes conveyed unquestioning loyal assurance to him. It needed no words to tell him they knew he was no thief. Jack experienced a sense of relief such as he had not felt since the moment of his making the ugly discovery. When he considered the net of circumstance that bound him round sometimes he was almost ready himself to doubt his honesty.

"I knew there was something behind," Mary murmured. "It was the day you found him out that I had my warning. I'm glad we came. Maybe we can help you" —she looked at him questioningly — "if you will let us stay."

"As long as you like," said Jack. "It's my idea we'll all be turning back in a couple of days. In the meantime Davy can help with the horses. We're short-handed."

"Couldn't we camp here by ourselves?" asked Mary quickly.

Jack shook his head. "It would look queer," he said. "You had better ride into our camp in the morning as if you'd just come."

Mary presently sent him home. The fire had paled, and the trees began to rise out of the graves of darkness at the touch of the ghostly wand of dawn. The

youngsters' pale and slightly haggard faces had a strange look to each other like things that had been left over from yesterday by mistake, and were hopelessly out of place this morning.

Jack lingered awkwardly. "Look here," he blurted out, "I haven't thanked you for coming. I don't know how. But you know what I feel!"

Sister and brother looked exquisitely uncomfortable, and absurdly alike. "There's nothing to be thanked for," murmured Mary. "Of course we came! That's what I had the warning for."

They shook hands. Mary's hand lay for an instant in Jack's passive and cold. But later she pillowed her cheek on that hand because he had touched it.

The permanent camp, that Sir Bryson had graciously permitted to be called Camp Trangmar, had been laid out with considerably more care than their nightly stopping-places. The main tent, with its three little wings, was erected at the top of the clearing, facing the river. A canvas had been stretched in front to make a veranda. On the right-hand side of the open square was Humpy's cooking outfit under another awning, with Humpy's tent and Jack's lean-to beyond. Across the square was Jean Paul's little tent and the ragged brown canvas that sheltered the Indians. The camp was ditched and drained according to the best usage, and around the whole was stretched a rope on poplar posts, to keep the straying horses from

nosing around the tents in their perpetual search for salt.

After breakfast next morning Sir Bryson issued a command for Jack to wait upon him. As Jack approached, Linda and Mrs. Worsley were sitting under the awning, each busy with a bit of embroidery. Jack, who had been for a swim in the river, looked as fresh as a daisy. As he passed inside Linda smiled at him with a frankness that disconcerted him greatly. If she was going to give the whole thing away to everybody like this! However, Mrs. Worsley gave no sign of having seen anything out of the ordinary.

It transpired that Sir Bryson wished to make a little exploration up the river. He inquired about a boat, and Jack offered him his own dugout that he had cached at this point on his way down the river. Sir Bryson was very much concerned about the speed of the current, but Jack assured him the Indians were accustomed to making way against it.

Sir Bryson cast a good deal of mystery about his little trip, and made it clear that he had no intention of taking Jack with him. Jack, who had a shrewd idea of his object, had no desire to be mixed up in it. He swallowed a grin and maintained a respectful air. He had discovered that there was more fun to be had in playing up to the little governor's grand airs than in flouting him. Afterward he would enact the scene by the fire, sure of an appreciative audience in Humpy Jull.

It was arranged that Sir Bryson should start in an hour, and that his party should take a lunch against an all-day trip.

As Jack came out Linda rose to meet him. "We will have the whole day to ourselves," she said softly.

Jack was nonplussed. Somehow, such a frank avowal dampened his own ardour. He glanced at Mrs. Worsley to see if she had heard, and his face stiffened. At this moment a diversion was created by the sound of horses' hoofs on the trail.

They looked around the tent to see Mary and Davy trotting down the little rise that ended at the camp, followed by two pack-ponies. Linda had not seen Mary before. Her eyes widened at the sight of another girl, and a very pretty one, riding into camp, and quickly sought Jack's face. A subtle and unbeautiful change passed over her at what she fancied she read there.

Sir Bryson, attracted by the sound, came out of the tent. "Who are they?" he asked Jack.

"The son and the daughter of the trader at Fort Cheever."

"Very pretty girl," said Sir Bryson condescendingly. "Pray bring them to me that I may make them welcome," he said as he went back.

Jack vaulted over the fence, and the three youngsters shook hands again with beaming smiles. Jack forgot that in order to keep up their little fiction he should have appeared more surprised to see them. Linda

looked on with darkening eyes. Jack led the horses around the square to the place next his own tent, where they were unpacked, unsaddled, and turned out. He then brought Mary and Davy back. Linda was not in evidence.

Within the tent Sir Bryson welcomed them as graciously as a king. "Very glad to see you," he said. "Which way are you travelling?"

Davy's adolescence was painfully embarrassed in the presence of the great man, but as the man of his party he blushed and faced him out. "We are going home," he said. "My sister has been nursing some sick Indians at Swan Lake."

Sir Bryson did not know of course that Camp Trangmar was not on the direct road between Swan Lake and Fort Cheever. "Ah!" he said, "most worthy of her, I'm sure. I trust you will remain with us a few days before you go on."

"If I can help around," said Davy. "Jack Chanty said you were short-handed."

"Excellent! Excellent!" said Sir Bryson.

Jack made a move toward the door, and Davy and Mary promptly followed. Sir Bryson fussed among his papers with an annoyed expression. As much as anything pertaining to his official position he enjoyed dismissing people. Consequently when they left before they were sent he felt a little aggrieved.

Outside, Sidney Vassall and Baldwin Ferrie were now with the two ladies. Linda was reclining languor-

ously in the folding chair, with her little feet crossed in front of her. She was pale and full of fine lady airs. Any one but Jack would have known that there was trouble brewing.

"Introduce your friends," she said to Jack in a clear, high voice.

Jack was only conscious of an extreme discomfort. He was oppressed by a sense of guilt that he resented. The air seemed full of electricity ready to discharge on some one's head. He looked very stiff and boyish as he spoke the names all round: "Miss Cranston, Davy Cranston; Miss Trangmar, Mrs. Worsley, Captain Vassall, Mr. Ferrie!"

They all smiled on the embarrassed newcomers, and made them welcome. In particular Linda's smile was overpoweringly sweet. Without changing her position she extended a languid little hand to Mary.

"So nice of you to come and see us," she drawled. "I hope you will remain with us until we go back."

To Jack this sounded all right. He felt relieved. Even yet he did not see what was coming. Mary's perceptions were keener. With a slightly heightened colour she stepped forward, took the hand with dignity, and let it fall.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "Not more than a day or two."

"But we need you," Linda insisted, "both of you. "Your brother can help the men who are nearly worked

to death, and if you would only help Mrs. Worsley and me with our things, you know, and other ways —— "

Mrs. Worsley looked quickly at Linda, astonished and indignant, but Linda affected not to see. As Jack realized the sense of what she was saying, a slow, dark red crept under his skin, and his face became as hard as stone.

Mary took it smilingly. Her chin went up a little, and she drew a slow breath before she answered. "I'm sorry," she said quietly, "but I have no experience with ladies' things."

There was a faint ring of irony in the last two words, and excepting Jack, who was too angry to see anything, it was evident to the others that Mary had returned just a little better than she got. Linda evidently felt so, for naked malice peeped out of her next speech.

"We would be so glad to teach you, wouldn't we, Kate? And it would be so useful for you to know!"

Mrs. Worsley bent over her work, blushing for her young friend.

Mary continued to look at Linda steadily, and it was finally Linda's eyes that were obliged to stray away. "Thank you," said Mary, "but we will be expected at home in a few days."

"Oh, sorry," said Linda casually. She nodded at Mary, and smiled the inattentive smile that women mean to stab with. "Kate, do show me this next stitch," she said, affecting a sudden absorption in her work.

Mrs. Worsley ignored the question. Her face was now almost as red as Jack's. What passed between these two ladies when they presently found themselves alone may be guessed.

Jack, Mary, and Davy crossed the little square. There was a commotion going on inside Jack that he could not in the least analyze. He was furiously angry, but his sidelong glances at Mary dashed his anger, and made him fall to wondering if he had rightly understood what had happened. For Mary, instead of being humiliated and indignant as one might suppose, was actually smiling. She carried her head high, and the shine of triumph was in her eye. What was a man to make of this? Jack could only long in vain for a head to knock about.

The explanation was simple. "How silly I was to be so afraid of her," Mary was thinking. "To give herself away like that! She's a poor thing! I'm a better woman than she, and she knows it now. She can be jealous of *me* after this." Behind these thoughts another peeped like an elf through a leafy screen, but since the maiden herself refused to see it in its hiding-place it is not fair to discover it to the world.

Mary refused to refer in any way to what had happened, and Jack was therefore tongue-tied. All he could do was to show his sympathy in the ardour of his muscular efforts on her behalf. He put up their two tents, and stowed their baggage; he cut a wholly unnecessary amount of balsam for Mary's bed, and

chopped and carried wood for their fire, until she stopped him. All this was observable to Linda watching from afar under her lashes, and in the meantime Kate was not sparing her.

Jack forgot all about Sir Bryson's order until a peremptory message recalled it. After he had embarked the governor, Baldwin Ferrie, and three Indians in the dugout, he swung an axe over his shoulder, and set off up the trail to chop down a tree or two, and "think things out," as he would have said. The operations of the human consciousness that go under the name of thinking differ widely in the individual. Meanwhile it should be mentioned that Jean Paul and Garrod had started on horseback with the object of finding a camp of Sapi Indians that was said to be not far away. They were gone all day. Jack hardly thought of them.

In a grove of pines beside the trail Jack swung his axe, and the blows rang. His design was to make a flagstaff for the centre of the camp. There was an immense satisfaction in stretching his muscles and planting the blade true. The blood coursed through his veins, and he tingled to his finger-tips. He felt so much better that he thought he had solved his problems. This was what Jack called "thinking things out."

He was engaged in chopping the limbs from a trunk with the stern air of concentration that was characteristic of him, when something caused him to look up,

and he saw Linda standing near with an appealing aspect. He frowned and went on chopping. Linda sat down on a stump and looked away with an unsuccessful attempt at unconcern. How astonished Vassall or Baldwin Ferrie would have been could they have seen their imperious little mistress then.

There was a long silence except for the light strokes of Jack's axe as he worked his way up the stem. Jack enjoyed a great advantage because he was busy. It was Linda who was finally obliged to speak.

"Haven't you anything to say?" she murmured.

"No," said Jack promptly. The light branches did not offer him a sufficient outlet for his pent-up feelings, and he wantonly attacked the bole of the biggest tree in sight. Linda watched the swing of his lithe body with a sort of stricken look. There was another silence between them.

"Jack, I'm sorry," she said at last in a small voice.

Jack was not so easily to be appeased. "You shouldn't come away from camp alone with me like this," he said. "Followed me," was what he had in mind, but he spared her pride that.

"I don't care what anybody thinks," she said quickly.

"I do," said Jack.

"Afraid of being compromised?" she asked with a little sneer.

"That's a silly thing to say," he answered coolly. "You know what I mean. I don't intend to give your

father and the other men a chance to throw 'thief' in my teeth. When I've cleared myself I'll walk with you openly."

"I was sorry," she said like a child. "I couldn't rest until I had told you."

Jack was silent and uncomfortable. Whenever she sounded the pathetic and childlike note, the male in him must needs feel the pull of compassion and he resented it.

"Don't you care for me any more?" she murmured.

Jack frowned, and aimed a tremendous blow at the tree.

Real terror crept into her voice. "Jack," she faltered.

"I don't take anything back," he said stubbornly. "I'll tell you when I feel like telling you, but I won't have it dragged out of me."

He returned to his tree, and she prodded the pine needles with the toe of her boot. After a while she returned to the charge.

More like a child than ever, she said: "Jack, I acted like a little beast. But I said I was sorry."

"That's all very well," said Jack, "but you can't expect to make me so mad I can't see straight, and then have it all right again just for the asking."

"You're ungenerous," she said, pouting.

"I don't know what you mean," he said obstinately. "I have to be what I am."

There was another silence. They were just where

they had started. Indeed no progress was possible without an explosion and a general flare-up. It was Jack who brought it on by saying:

"It's not to me you should be saying you're sorry."

Linda sprang up pale and trembling, and the flood gates of invective were opened. It is no advantage to a jealous woman to be a governor's daughter. Linda in a passion lacked dignity. Her small face worked like a child's preparing to bawl, and her gestures were febrile. What is said at such moments is seldom worth repeating. Jack did not hear the words; it was her tone that stung him beyond endurance. But at last a sentence reached his understanding.

"How dare you bring her here, and install her under my eyes?"

"Bring her here? What do you mean?" he demanded in a voice that forced her to attend.

"Oh, you know very well what I mean!" she cried. "You knew she was coming this morning. I saw it in your face. You didn't even pretend that you were surprised. And you took her part against me all the way through."

There was enough truth in this to make Jack furiously angry in turn. His voice silenced hers.

"I did take her part!" he cried. "And I'd do it again. What have you got to complain of? Just like a girl to fly into a rage and blame everybody all around, just to cover her own tracks! What did you mean by offering to engage her as your maid? You

don't want a maid. You only did it to insult her! I was ashamed of you. Everybody was ashamed of you. If you're suffering for it now, it's no more than you ought."

Under all this and more she sat with an odd, still look from which one would almost have said she enjoyed having him abuse her.

And so they both emptied themselves of angry speech, and the inevitable moment of reaction followed. Both Linda and Jack began to feel that they had said too much.

"I'm sorry," she said humbly. "It's true, I was only jealous of her, because you seemed so glad to see her."

"If it's any good to you to hear it," said Jack sheepishly, "she's nothing to me — that way." Even as he said it his heart accused him.

"Besides," said Linda irrelevantly, "she's mad about you."

"That's nonsense!" said Jack. Nevertheless he quickly turned to pick up his axe in order to hide the telltale red that crept into his face.

"It's all right now, isn't it?" said Linda coaxingly. "Come and kiss me."

He obediently went, and, stooping, kissed her upturned lips. But for both of them the delicious sweetness had flown. Jack could not forget how ugly her face had looked in a passion, and Linda remembered how he had worked for Mary.

"You didn't do it like that last night," she said, pouting.

"I felt differently last night," said Jack doggedly. "How can I get up any enthusiasm when you make me do it?"

Her breast began to heave again. "You said you had forgiven me," she said.

"Oh, don't let's begin that again," said Jack with a dismayed look. "I haven't anything to forgive you. If you want to make things really all right, you can do it in a minute!"

She sprang up again. "I won't! I won't!" she cried passionately. "It's her coming that has made the difference since last night! How dare you suggest that I apologize to her! I'd die rather! I hate you! Don't ever speak to me again!"

Of a sudden she was gone like a little tempest among the trees. Jack sat down on the trunk he had cut, and rested his chin in his palms, terribly troubled in his mind. This sort of thing was new to him, and it seemed of much greater moment than it was.

Pretty soon she came flying back again, and casting herself in his arms, clung to him like a baby, weeping and whimpering.

"Take care of me, Jack! I don't know what I'm doing or saying!"

His arms closed about her, and he patted her shoulder with an absurd, sheepish, paternal air of concern. What else could he do? "There, it's all right!" he

said clumsily. "Don't distress yourself. It'll be all right!"

"And you won't make me apologize to her?" she implored.

"No," he said with a shrug. "I don't suppose it would do any good if you did."

Linda lay perfectly still. A sense of sweet satisfaction stole into her breast. It had been a hard fight, but she *had* made him do what she wanted.

"Hanged if I know what's going to become of us," thought Jack gloomily.

## IX

## YELLOW METAL

THE fiction that coal was the objective of Sir Bryson Trangmar's expedition was scarcely maintained; indeed, once they got away from Fort Cheever the word was never heard again. On the other hand, a little word that resembled it circulated continually with a thrilling intonation. Stories of gold and gold-hunters were told over the fires in English and Cree. Baldwin Ferrie, the geologist, kept the subject agitated by cracking every likely looking stone he came to with his little hammer, and by studying the composition of the mountain tops all day with his powerful glasses.

We are told that the essence of comedy lies in the exposure of pretentiousness. That being so, the comic spirit is highly developed up North. In town pretentiousness is largely a matter of give and take; we are all pretending to something, and we are obliged to seem to allow the pretences of our neighbours in order to get them to allow ours. But up North they are beholden to no man, and, sardonic jesters that they are, they lie in wait for pretentiousness. Woe to the man who goes up North and "puts on side."

One like Sir Bryson was therefore bound to be considered fair game. His official position was no protection to him. There is a story current about a governor-general, and another about an actual prince of the blood, who did not escape. All of which is to say that Jack, notwithstanding his perplexities in other directions, was looking forward with keen relish to the return of Sir Bryson's "exploring-party." He only regretted that there was none at hand but Humpy Jull with whom to share the joke.

They landed toward the end of the day, Sir Bryson and Baldwin Ferrie looking very glum. Jack was sent for. He found Sir Bryson alone at his table, looking more than usually important and puffy.

"Do you know two men called Beckford and Rowe?" he asked.

Jack adopted an innocent-respectful line. "Yes, sir," he said. "They were working in the pass here at the same time I was."

"Are you, or have you ever been, associated with them?"

Jack shook his head. "I'm on my own," he said. "Always."

"What kind of a reputation do these men bear?" asked Sir Bryson.

"Bad," said Jack.

Sir Bryson frowned, and squeezed his pointed beard. "How, bad?" he wanted to know.

"Confidence men. They were square enough up

here. They had to be. They saved their game to work outside."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Sir Bryson.

"It's no secret," said Jack. "Beckford bragged about what he'd do."

"And did no one take any steps to stop them?"

"It was none of our business," said Jack. "And if it had been we couldn't very well follow them all over, and warn people off, could we?"

Sir Bryson snorted. "Where have they staked out claims?" he demanded.

"Oh, all over," said Jack. "Anything good they keep dark, of course."

"Did you ever hear of Dexter's Creek?"

Jack bit his lip. "Oh, yes," he said with an innocent stare. "Those were what they called their sucker claims."

Sir Bryson swelled like a turkey-cock, and turned an alarming colour, but he said nothing. What could he say?

Your Northern humourist is merciless. Jack was not nearly through with him. He went on full of solicitude: "I hope you didn't fall for anything on Dexter Creek, Sir Bryson. If you'd only mentioned it before, I could have warned you, and saved all this trip!"

"I have nothing to do with Dexter's Creek," said Sir Bryson quickly. "I have other objects. I merely promised the attorney-general of the province to do a little detective work for him."

Jack could appreciate quick wits in a victim. "Well turned," he thought, and waited for Sir Bryson's next lead.

"Well, well," said the little man testily. "Explain what you mean by — by this vulgar expression."

"Sucker claims?" said Jack wickedly. It really pained him that there was no one by to benefit by this.

"You needn't repeat the word," snapped Sir Bryson. "It is offensive to me."

"It's this way," said Jack: "Most of the prospectors in the country are staked by bankers and business men outside. And when they at last make a strike, after years of failure, maybe, their backers generally step in and grab the lion's share. Consequently the men up here are sore on the city fellows; they have none of the hardships or the work they say; they just sit back comfortably and wait for the profits.

"Beckford said that he and his partner had been done a couple of times in this way, and they were out to get square with the bankers. When they found anything good they kept it dark, and went outside and sold some fake claims to raise the coin to work the good ones. Beckford said it was just as easy to sell fake claims as good ones, if you went about it right.

"I said," Jack went on, "they'll set the police after you. Beckford said: 'They can't. We don't make any misrepresentations. We're too smart. We make a mystery of it, and the sucker gets excited, and swallows it whole. We do the innocent game,' he said; 'we're

the simple, horny-handed tons of soil from the North that ain't on to city ways. We make 'em think they're putting it all over us, and we sell out cheap. Two of us can work it fine!' "

"I said," Jack continued, " 'I don't see how you can get anybody to shell out real money unless you offer to come back and show them the place.' 'We always do offer to come back,' Beckford said, 'and we get all ready to come. But at the last moment one of us is took real sick, and the other refuses to leave his dyin' pardner. By that time the come-on is so worked up he comes across anyway!' "

During this recital Sir Bryson's face was a study. A kind of shamed chagrin restrained him from a violent explosion. Jack "had" him, as Jack would have said. The little beard was in danger of being plucked out bodily.

"You can go now," he said in an apoplectic voice.

"There was one thing more," Jack said at the door. "Beckford said that if you picked your man right there was no danger of a prosecution. 'Choose one of these guys that sets an awful store on his respectability,' he said, 'and he'll never blow on himself.' "

A deeper tinge of purple crept into Sir Bryson's puffing cheeks.

Jack lingered for a parting shot. "Any man who did get let in for such a game," he said with a great air of innocence, "hardly deserves any sympathy, does he, Sir Bryson?"

Sir Bryson was now beyond speech. He got to his feet; he pulled at his collar for more air, and he pointed mutely to the door.

Jack embraced Humpy Jull by the fire, and moaned incoherently. No amount of laughter could ease his breast of the weight of mirth that oppressed it. Never was such a joke known in the North.

During the rest of the evening Jack was in momentary expectation of an order to break camp and turn back, but none came. On the contrary, Humpy reported, from the scraps of conversation he had overheard at the dinner-table, that Sir Bryson, being convinced there was gold somewhere in the pass, was determined, with Baldwin Ferrie's assistance to do a little hunting on his own account. Jack smiled indulgently at the news. It was not long, however, before he had to change his superior attitude.

Early on the following morning he was fishing in the backwater below camp, while Baldwin Ferrie sat on a projecting point of the bank above, patiently searching the mountainsides with his glasses.

"I say," Ferrie suddenly called out, "how far is that peak over there, the pointed one?"

"About nine miles in a line from here," said Jack. "Fifteen, up the river and in."

"What's it called?"

"Tetrahedron," said Jack. "A surveyor named it."

"Do you know it at all?" asked Ferrie.

"Pretty well," said Jack, off-hand.

"The slope on this side," asked the geologist, "I suppose there is a stream that drains it? Could you take us to it?"

Jack looked at him hard, and reeled in his line before he answered. "There is a little stream," he said, approaching Ferrie. "It has no name. It empties into Seven-Mile Creek above here. Anybody could find it. Why do you ask?"

Ferrie was an amiable soul, and not at all secretive, like his master. He went into a detailed explanation of the geological formation of Tetrahedron peak. "You see, it's different from the others," he said, offering Jack the glasses. "There's a good chance of finding free gold in the bed of the creek that drains the slope on this side."

Jack whistled in his mind, as one might say, and looked with a new respect at Baldwin Ferrie and his field glasses. For it was on that very little stream he had washed his gold, and there his claims were situated. It had taken him months of strenuous labour to find what the geologist had stumbled on in half an hour sitting still.

Baldwin Ferrie toddled off to report to his master, and Jack sat down to do some quick thinking. This discovery came of the nature of a thunderclap. The possibility of their finding his claims had occurred to him, but he had counted at least on having time to prepare against it, and here it was only the third day. Jack had made sure of the choicest claim on Tetrahe-

dron Creek for himself, and that, of course, they could not touch. But the two adjoining claims, practically as rich, were still vacant, and Jack meant to have at least the bestowal of those himself.

Sir Bryson presently ordered Jean Paul to get the dugout ready for another all-day trip. In excluding Jack from any share in the preparations he saved that young man from an embarrassing position, for had he been officially informed of the destination of the river party, Jack would have had to make explanations on the spot.

As it was, even before Sir Bryson was ready, he became busy on his own account. Finding Davy, he said: "Catch two horses, and saddle them for you and Mary. You've got to do something for me, and for her to-day. There's not a minute to lose. While you're saddling up, I'll explain everything to Mary."

Davy, who would have gone through Hell's Opening itself at Jack's command, raced away to find the horses.

Mary was at the door of her tent sewing. At the sound of Jack's step she lifted her quiet eyes. There was something in the uplift of Mary's eyes that stirred Jack queerly, seeing that he was as good as engaged to another girl, but he put that aside for the present.

Before he could speak she asked quickly: "What's the matter?"

He sat beside her on the ground. "Something doing," he said, "something big! Listen hard, and don't give

it away in your face. Go on sewing as if I was just passing the time of day."

"I'm listening," she said quietly.

"You know I told you I'd been prospecting," Jack began. "Well, I made a rich strike on the little creek that comes down from Tetrahedron peak. I staked my claim there, and two claims adjoining mine for whoever I might want to go in with me on it. The names and dates aren't entered on the two stakes yet, and of course if these people find them they have a right to enter their own names. Baldwin Ferrie has doped it out that there's gold on that creek, and that's where they're off to now. You and Davy must get there first."

"But how can we?" she said. "They're starting."

"It will take them three hours to make the mouth of Seven-Mile Creek against the current," he said. "You can ride it in one. Davy is getting the horses. If you can get yourselves across the river before they come up, the claims are saved."

Mary went on with her quick, even stitches without a break. "Tell me exactly how to go," she said.

"Six miles west by the Fort Erskine trail, and then down to the river. You leave the trail where it turns to the north, under three big pines that stand by the themselves on the bench. Look sharp and you will find a trail that I blazed down to the river. At the end of it I left a little raft for crossing back and forth. If it has been washed down you'll have to knock

another one together. Cross the river, and land at the lower side of Seven-Mile Creek. You'll find my landing-place there, and a good trail back to the little creek, and my old camp. The first square post is a hundred feet upstream from the campfire. You can't miss it. Keep on going until you come to the second post, and the third one."

"What must we do when we find the posts?" she asked.

"Read the notice on the first one, and that will show you. It reads: 'I, Malcolm Piers, hereby give notice of my intention to file a claim,' and so forth. And signed and dated at the bottom. The inscriptions are all written on the other two. All you have to do is to fill in your name on the second one, 'I, Mary Cranston,' and so on, and on the third post Davy writes, 'David Cranston, Junior.'"

Mary stopped sewing. "My name," she said, "and Davy's?"

"The second claim is yours in your own right," said Jack. Seeing her expression, he hastily added: "It was a deal that I made with your father before we started. As to the other, Davy can sign that back to me."

"So will I sign mine," said Mary quickly. "I couldn't take it."

"We can argue that out when you come back," said Jack. "There's not a minute to lose. Davy's got the horses. Make sure you have a lead pencil to write

on the posts. After you've signed them get back without running into the governor's party if you can. I don't want the storm to break until I am there to receive it."

Ten minutes after Sir Bryson with Baldwin Ferrie and three Indians, had pushed off from the bank, Mary and Davy Cranston sauntered inconspicuously away from camp, and, mounting their horses outside, set off at a dead run west on the Fort Erskine trail.

## X

## A CRUMBLING BRAIN

JACK set about to fill his anxious day as full as possible with small tasks. Along the shore toward the mouth of the canyon he found another dugout sticking out from among the bushes, and he pulled it out to put it in repair in case a second boat should be required. It needed new cross-pieces to hold the sides from spreading.

While he was seated on a boulder whittling his little braces out of snowy poplar, Garrod came shambling over the stones toward him. Jack, seeing the high-powered rifle he carried, turned a little grim, and while apparently going on with his work, watched the other man narrowly. His ideas covering Garrod had taken a new direction since he had talked with Mary.

Garrod came slowly, pausing, starting jerkily, fluctuating from side to side. When he thought Jack's eyes were upon him he turned his back like a child, and made believe to look off up the river. His eyes were blank and lustreless, but close-hid under the thickened lids glimmered a mean furtive sentence. There was no striking change in him; the canvas suit was still in fair condition; he shaved every morning from force of habit;

and when he was spoken to he could still answer with sufficient intelligence. But any one experienced in diseased mental states would have recognized at once that this man was in no condition to be trusted at large with a gun.

Among the members of Sir Bryson's party there existed an entire absence of formality together with an entire absence of intimacy. They were not curious about each other, consequently Garrod's state excited no remark. True, Mrs. Worsley wondered a little, but she had always felt an antipathy to Garrod; as for the others, they merely said, "Queerer than ever," and dismissed him with a shrug.

Jack, watching the wavering figure approaching him now, thought of the reckless, hawk-eyed youth of five years before, and was made thoughtful by the change. "Gad! Life has had him on the toaster," he thought.

When Garrod came close enough to be heard he stammered, avoiding Jack's eyes: "I — I want to talk to you, Malcolm."

"Put down the gun," said Jack coolly. "Out of reach."

Garrod immediately laid it on the stones. "You don't think that I ——" he mumbled.

"I don't think anything," said Jack, "but I'm taking no chances."

Garrod's eyes strayed everywhere, and his voice maundered. "I suppose you think I'm an utter cur.

I know it looks bad. But not that —— Maybe you think that I — your horse — on the cliff ——"

"I'm not accusing you," said Jack.

Garrod sat down near him. "I — want to talk to you," he said, forgetting that he had said it before.

"All that you and I have to say to each other can be put in one question and answer," said Jack. "Are you going to square me?"

"I — I'd like to," stammered Garrod.

Jack looked up surprised. There was more in the answer than he had expected. "You will?" he cried, bright-eyed. "You've come to tell me that! By Gad! that would be a plucky thing to do after all these years. I didn't think you had it in you!"

"I — I'd like to," murmured Garrod, as before.

"Easy enough if you want to," said Jack. "You only have to speak the truth."

"That wouldn't do you any good," said Garrod.

"What do you mean?" Jack demanded.

"It's not what you think," said Garrod. "I didn't take the money."

"Who did then?"

"The bank was robbed," said Garrod. "The morning after you went away. Three men broke in during the night, and hid until morning. When Rokeby and I opened the safe, they overpowered us and got away with the money. We had no business to open up until the others came, and we were afraid to tell. I thought it wouldn't do you any harm as long as you

were away. If you had come back I would have told."

There was a glib tone in all this that caused Jack's lip to curl. "Well, what's to prevent your telling now?" he asked.

"They wouldn't believe me," said Garrod. "They'd think I was just trying to shield you, my old friend."

"But there's Rokeby to back you up!"

"He's dead," muttered Garrod.

A harsh note of laughter broke from Jack.

"I suppose you don't believe me," said Garrod.

"Hardly," said Jack. "It fits in a bit too well."

Garrod's voice rose shaky and shrill: "It's true! I swear it! Three men; French, they were. I can see them now! One was young; he had a scar across his forehead ——"

"Oh, cut out the fine touches," said Jack contemptuously. "Any fool could see you were lying." He went on whittling his brace.

Garrod's voice sunk to a whimper. "It's true! It's true!"

Jack began to perceive that it was scarcely a reasonable being he had to deal with. He took a different line. "I guess you've led a dog's life these last few years," he said quietly.

Garrod looked at him queerly. "Oh, my God." he said in a flat voice. "Nobody knows."

"I suppose you know what's the matter with you," said Jack. There was no answer.

"It's what the story-books call remorse," said Jack. "You can't go to work and ruin your best friend without having bad dreams afterward."

"I never took the money," Garrod murmured.

Jack ignored it. "Your friend," he repeated with a direct look. "Do you remember, as we stood waiting for my train to pull out, you put your arm around my shoulders, and said: 'Buck up, old fel'! We've got in many a hole together, and we always saw each other out! Count on me — until death!' Do you remember that?"

"Yes," murmured Garrod.

"And next morning you took the money to pay your debts, to get you out of your hole, knowing they would put it off on me. You pushed me into a hole as deep as hell, and left me to rot there."

Garrod put up a trembling hand as if to fend off a blow. "I didn't take it," he murmured still.

"Look me in the eyes, and swear it," demanded Jack.

He could not.

"Now, look here," said Jack. "You're in a bad way. You can't stand much more. There's going to be a grand show-down to-night. Do you think you can go through with that?"

"Eh?" asked Garrod, dully and anxiously.

"Listen to me, and try to understand," said Jack impatiently. "Sir Bryson has gone to look at my claims. He will read the name Malcolm Piers written

on the post, and when he comes back he will know who I am, and there'll be the deuce to pay. Do you think you're in any state to face me down? Why, man, the very look of you is enough to give you away!"

Garrod merely looked at him with dull, frightened eyes. "Suppose you could face me down," Jack continued, "what then? You can't face yourself down. You were born a decent fellow at heart, Frank, and you can't get away with this sort of thing. It's *got* you. And every new lie you tell just adds to the nightmare that's breaking you now. You've reached the limit. Anything more, and you'll go clean off your head."

"You'll tell Sir Bryson everything," muttered Garrod.

"When I am accused I defend myself," said Jack.

"I couldn't go through with it. I couldn't," Garrod said like a frightened, stupefied schoolboy.

"Sure, you couldn't," urged Jack, pursuing his advantage. "Make a clean breast of it before Sir Bryson comes home, and you won't have to face him at all. By Gad! think what a load off your mind! You'd be cured then; you'd sleep; you'd be a man again!"

But Garrod murmured again: "I didn't take the money."

Jack fought hard for his good name. His need lent him an eloquence more than his own. In all this he never stooped by so much as a word to plead for

himself. "Why shouldn't you tell the truth?" he persisted. "What good is this life you're leading to you? It'll kill you in a month. Chuck it all, and stay in this country, and win back your health, and your brains, and your self-respect."

Garrod wavered. He half turned to Jack with a more human look. "Would — would you be friends with me again?" he murmured.

"I'd stand by you," said Jack quickly. "I've got my start up here, and I could give you a good one. As long as I stood by you no one could rake up old scores. But it couldn't be just the same as it used to be," his honesty forced him to add.

Jack waited with his eyes fixed compellingly on the other man. Garrod's eyes struggled to escape them, and could not. Suddenly he broke down, and buried his head in his arms. "I'll do it!" he sobbed.

Jack sprang up. "Good!" he cried with blazing eyes. "The whole truth? You took the money, and spent it, and let them fasten the theft on me?"

"I took the money, and spent it, and let them fasten the theft on you," repeated Garrod.

Jack drew a long breath, and, sitting again, wiped his face. Not until he felt the sense of relief that surged through him did he realize how much this had meant to him. He could look almost kindly on the stricken figure in front of him now, and the sobs inspired him with none of the disgust he would have felt at any other time. He waited patiently for Garrod

to recover himself. When the man at last became quiet he said, not unkindly:

"Are you ready now?"

"For what?" asked Garrod, lifting a terrified face.

"Let us go back to camp. Vassall is there. You can tell him."

Garrod desperately shook his head. "Linda — Miss Trangmar is there. I couldn't — I couldn't have her hear me!"

"But we could take Vassall away."

"No," he said. "Don't you understand? Vassall is after her. He'll be glad of this. I couldn't tell him."

"What if he knew about Linda and me," thought Jack with a sidelong look. "Gad! but life's a rum go!"

"I'd rather face Sir Bryson," stuttered Garrod. "Wait till Sir Bryson comes back. I swear I'll tell him the whole truth, and you shall be there."

"You're right, I'll be there," said Jack grimly. He considered, frowning. It might be better to confront Sir Bryson with Garrod direct, but Sir Bryson would not be back for five or six hours, and who could tell what contradictions of mood would pass over this half-insane man in the interval.

As if reading his mind, Garrod said: "I won't take anything back. You needn't be afraid — if you let me stay with you. You're my only hope. Let me stay with you. Give me something to do all day."

Jack rubbed his chin in perplexity. "Will you write out a confession?" he finally asked.

Garrod eagerly nodded his head.

"Wait here, then," commanded Jack.

Jack ran to his tent, where he got a pen and his note-book, and returned to the dugout. He was gone but two minutes, nevertheless as he sprang down the bank he saw that Garrod was no longer alone. Jean Paul had joined him.

It did not occur to Jack that the half-breed had any concern in this affair, but he was annoyed by his intrusion just at this minute. He looked at him sharply. Jean Paul stood idly chewing a grass-stalk, and looking out over the river with a face as expressionless as brown paper. Garrod was sitting as Jack had left him, looking at Jean Paul. A change had passed over his eyes.

Jack's temper got a little the better of him. "What do you want here?" he demanded.

Jean Paul turned with an air of mild surprise. "Not'ing," he said. "W'at's the matter? I saw you and Garrod here, and I came. I got not'ing to do."

"Go find something," said Jack. "Clear out! Make yourself scarce! Vamoose!"

Jean Paul, with a deprecatory shrug, walked slowly on up the beach.

"I have pen and paper," Jack said eagerly to Garrod.

Garrod's dazed eyes were following Jean Paul's retreating figure. He paid no attention. It was only too evident that his mood had changed.

Jack's face grew red. "Have you gone back on it already?" he said with an oath.

"I must go," muttered Garrod, struggling to rise.

Jack thrust him back. "You stay where you are!"

But as soon as Jack took his hands off him Garrod endeavoured to get up and follow Jean Paul, who by this time had climbed the bank. Garrod's wasted strength was no match for Jack's but Jack could hardly see himself sitting there holding the other man down until Sir Bryson returned. He looked around for inspiration. There was a length of rope fastened to the bow of the dugout. Cutting off a piece of it, he tied Garrod's wrists and ankles, and let him lie.

Jack sat down and filled his pipe, watching Garrod grimly meanwhile, and trying to puzzle out a solution. The man spoke no articulate word except to mutter once or twice that he must go. Occasionally he struggled feebly in his bonds like a fish at the last gasp. Still it did not occur to Jack to connect this new phase of his sickness with the appearance of the half-breed. Jack's heart was sore. "Of what use was the confession of a man in such a state?" he thought. In Jack's simple system of treatment there was but one remedy for all swoons or seizures, viz., cold water. Upon thinking of this he got up and, filling his hat in the river, dashed the contents in Garrod's face.

It had the desired effect. Garrod gasped and shivered, and looked at Jack as if he saw him for the first. He ceased to struggle, and Jack untied the ropes.

Garrod sat up, a ghastly figure, with the water trickling from his dank hair over his livid face.

"I'm all wet," he said, putting up the back of his hand. Without expressing any curiosity as to what had happened, he dried his face and neck with his handkerchief.

"Do you remember what we were talking about?" asked Jack, concealing his anxiety.

"You wanted me to write something," Garrod said dully.

"Are you willing?"

Garrod nodded, and held out his hand for the pen and the little book.

Jack breathed freely again. The blade of a paddle served Garrod for a writing table. The man was entirely submissive.

"But do you know what you're doing?" demanded Jack frowning.

Garrod nodded again. "You want me to write out a confession," he said. "What shall I write."

Jack dictated: "I, Francis Garrod, desire to state of my own free will that on the morning of October ninth, nineteen hundred and six, I took the sum of five thousand dollars from the vault of the Bank of Canada, Montreal. I knew that Malcolm Piers had gone away, and I allowed the theft to be fixed on him."

He signed the page, and dated it. Taking the book, Jack slipped it in the breast pocket of his flannel shirt.

Jack was genuinely moved. It was borne in on him dimly that though he was technically the injured party, it was the other man who showed the wound.

"You'll feel better now," he said gruffly.

Garrod lay back on the stones, and covered his face with his arm. "I suppose you loathe me, Malcolm," he muttered.

"You've gone a long way to make it up," Jack said, in the keenest discomfort. "Just give me a little time."

Garrod's thoughts strayed in another direction. "What will *she* say?" he whispered.

Considering everything, this was a poser for Jack. "You've got no business to be thinking about girls in your state," he said frowning. "Put her out of your mind, man, and go to work to win back what you've lost."

Garrod reverted to the night five years before. "I didn't mean to take the money," he murmured. "I couldn't sleep after you went, that night, and all night I played with the idea as if it was a story. Supposing I *did* take the money, you know, how I would cover my tracks, and so on. But I never meant to. And next morning when I went to the bank I was alone in the vault for a moment, and I slipped the package in my pocket just to carry out the idea, and Rokeby came in before I could put it back. Then the money was counted, and the shortage discovered. I had plenty of other chances to put it back, for the

money was counted twenty times, but I was always afraid of being seen, and I kept putting it off, and at last the alarm was given and it was to late. They were old bills and they couldn't be traced.

"I don't know how I lived through the time that followed. I was afraid to put it back then, because the fellows talked about my changed looks, and I knew if the money turned up they would suspect me. As it was, they thought I was grieving on your account. I was, too, but not the way they thought. I set a store by you, Malcolm. I didn't mean to injure you. I just drifted into it, and I was caught before I knew. The thought of meeting you brought the sweat pouring out of me. I thought you would come back. I bought a revolver, and carried it always. If I had come face to face with you it would have nerved me to turn it on myself, which I couldn't do alone.

"You didn't come. The thing was quickly hushed up. I left the bank, and my life went on like anybody's. I didn't think about the money any more. But something had changed in me. I was nervous and cranky without knowing why. I couldn't sleep nights. I was full of silly terrors, always looking around corners, and over my shoulder. And it kept getting worse."

Garrod's voice never varied from the toneless half-whisper that was like a man talking in his sleep. "Then I came up here," he went on, "and ran into you without any warning. It was like a blow on the temple. It all came back to me. Then I knew what

was the matter. I didn't kill myself on the spot, because I found you didn't know. I wish I had. I've died a thousand deaths since. It was like little knives in my brain thrusting and hacking. I could have screamed with it ——"

Jack's increasing discomfort became more than he could bear. "For heaven's sake, don't tell all this," he burst out. "At least not to me. I'm the one you injured. Pull yourself together!"

"It is a relief to get it out," Garrod murmured with a sigh. "I can sleep now."

Jack got up. "Sleep, that's what you need," he said. "Come back to your tent, and lie low for the rest of the day."

"I — I don't want to be alone," stammered Garrod.

"Well, stretch out here in the grass," suggested Jack.

"You won't go away without waking me?" Garrod said anxiously.

"All right," said Jack.

Above the stones of the beach extended a narrow strip of grass, shaded from the sun by thickly springing willows. Behind and above the willows the trail skirted the escarpment of the bank. Garrod crawled into the shade and stretched himself out. Once or twice he started up to look rather wildly if Jack were still there; finally he slept.

Meanwhile Jack, returning to the dugout, took up his poplar braces again, with the instant concentration on the job in hand of which he was capable. Jack's

highly practical temperament was at once the source of his strength and his weakness. On the one hand, he conserved his nervous energy by refusing to worry about things not immediately present; on the other hand, his refusal to track these same things down in his mind often left him unprepared for further eventualities. At this moment, while his attentive blue eyes directed his sure hands, he had not altogether ceased to think of the strange things that had happened, but it was only a subconscious current. There was evidence of it in the way his hand occasionally strayed to the pocket of his shirt to make sure the little book was still there.

Jack had pushed the dugout partly into the water. The stern floated in a backwater on the lower side of a little point of stones that jutted out. On this point impinged the descending current, which was deflected out, straight for the opening in the wall of rock, a thousand feet or so downstream. Little could be seen of this opening from above; the first fall hid the white welter below, and the bend in the walls of rock closed up the prospect. It was as if the river came to an end here in a round bay with a stony beach, and rich, green-clad shores. Only the deep, throaty roar from under the wall of rock gave warning that this was really "Hell's Opening."

Jack thought of no reason for watching Garrod now, and his back was turned to him as he worked. He therefore did not notice that the leaves of the willows above

Garrod's head were occasionally twitched on their stems in a different way from the fluttering produced by a current of air. Only a sharp and attentive eye could have spotted it, for the movement was very slight, and there were long pauses between. After a while the leaves low down were parted, and for an instant a dark face showed, bright and eager with evil. It was Jean Paul. Marking Jack's position and Garrod's, he drew back. Garrod was immediately below him.

More minutes passed. The patience of a redskin is infinite.

Finally Garrod began to twitch and mutter in his sleep, and presently he rolled over on his back, wide awake. Jack threw him a careless glance, and went on working. As Garrod lay staring at the leaves over his head, a change passed subtly over his face; the lines of his flesh relaxed a little, a slight glaze seemed to be drawn over his eyes. In the end he slowly raised himself on one elbow, and looked at Jack with an exact reproduction of the cunning, hateful expression Jean Paul had shown. He quickly dropped back, and lay, waiting.

Presently, Jack having finished the shaping of his braces, picked up hammer and nails, and with another off-hand glance at the apparently sleeping Garrod, climbed into the dugout. He put in the stern thwart first, sitting on his heels in the bottom of the dugout, with his back toward the shore.

Garrod raised his head again, and seeing Jack's attitude, drew himself slowly up, and came crawling with infinite caution down over the stones. Back among the leaves a fiery pair of eyes was directing him. This was where Jack's faculty of concentration proved his undoing. Driving the nails as if his soul's fate rested on the accuracy of his strokes, he never looked around. Garrod covered the last five yards at a crouching run. Seizing the bow of the dugout, and exerting all his strength, he heaved the craft out into the stream.

The force and the suddenness of the shove threw Jack flat on his back. By the time he recovered himself, the dugout fairly caught in the current and, gradually gaining way, was headed straight for Hell's Opening.

If Jack allowed the moment to take him unwares, it must be said he wasted no time when it came. His faculties leaped in the presence of danger. His bright, wary, calculating eyes first sought for the paddle, but it lay back on the stones where Garrod had used it. He looked at Garrod. The man had picked up his gun, and was running toward him. He kept pace with the moving dugout along the edge of the stones. Not more than fifty feet separated the two men. Jack measured the distance to the backwater. Ten swimming strokes would have carried him to safety.

"If you jump overboard I'll shoot," Garrod murmured huskily. "I'll get you easy in the water!"

Jack saw that it was madness he had to deal with, and he wasted no words with him. Garrod, crouching,

stumbling over the stones, with his strained, inhuman eyes fixed on Jack, was an ugly sight. He muttered as he went:

"I've got to kill you. I can't help it. I've got to!"

Jack stood up in the canoe. The blue eyes were steady, and the thin line of his lips was firm, but the rich colour slowly faded out of his sunburned face, leaving it like old ivory. All this had happened in a moment; the dugout was not yet fully under way, though it seemed to Jack as if it were flying down. The harbouring backwater still stretched between him and the shore. He had a minute or longer to make his choice. The roaring canyon that ground its great tree-trunks into shreds was vividly present before his eyes; on the other hand, he could jump overboard and make his bobbing head a mark like a bottle for a madman to shoot at. A minute to decide in, and there he was tinglingly alive, and life was very sweet.

A woman's frightened voice rang out: "Jack! what are you doing out there? Come ashore!"

He looked and saw Linda standing in the trail by the bank's edge. Garrod was hidden from her by the intervening bushes. She came flying down, regardless. Garrod heard the voice, and, turning toward it, stopped dead. His muscles relaxed, and the butt of the gun dropped on the stones.

Jack laughed, and jumped overboard. Half a dozen strokes carried him into the backwater; twenty landed him hands and knees on the stones. Rising

face to face with Garrod, he snatched the gun from his nerveless hands and sent it spinning into the bushes. Without looking at the girl he ran and caught up the paddle, ran back along the stones, plunged in and, heading off the dugout, wriggled himself aboard. It became a question then of his strength against the sucking current. The dugout hung in the stream as if undecided. Finally it swung around inch by inch, swept inshore, and grounded with perhaps five yards to spare.

As he landed the second time Linda cast herself weeping and trembling on his dripping bosom. "What did you frighten me like that for?" she cried, beating him with her small fists.

Jack laughed, and held her off. "It's a good boat," he said; "besides, the hammer was in it, the only one we have."

"How did you get adrift?" she demanded.

Jack looked at Garrod with a hardening eye. Garrod still stood where he had stopped. His eyes were blank of sense or feeling. Linda flew toward him, her slight frame instinct and quivering with menace.

"You coward!" she hissed.

Jack held her off. "Let him alone," he said. "His wits are clean gone!"

He started to lead Garrod, unresisting, back to camp. Suddenly he remembered the note-book, and his hand flew to his pocket. It was gone.

## XI

## THE SHOWDOWN

SIDNEY VASSALL, wondering what had become of Linda, wandered about camp covertly looking for her. The amiable young aide-de-camp had his dull heartache too, these days. An instinct warned him that the humble attitude he displayed toward her would never succeed in focussing the little beauty's attention on himself, but he was unable to change it. He was the victim of his own amiability.

Coming to the edge of the bank, he met the odd little procession coming up; Garrod with his wild, blank stare; Jack with his hand twisted in Garrod's collar, and Linda following at a little distance, pale, angry, and frightened.

Vassall's jaw dropped. "What's the matter?" he stammered.

Jack let go his hold on Garrod, and scowled at him, angry and perplexed. "He's mad," he said shortly. "Clean daft!"

Vassall fell back a step. "Easy, for God's sake," he murmured. "She'll hear you."

"Oh, she knows," Jack said carelessly. "The question is, what are we to do with him?"

The first command in Vassall's highly artificial code was: "Keep it from the women!" Turning to Linda with a shaky imitation of his polite smile, he said: "Mrs. Worsley has been wondering where you were. You'll find her in the big tent."

To which Linda's impatient rejoinder was: "Don't be silly."

"This is no place for you," Vassall went on earnestly; "I beg that you will go to Mrs. Worsley, and let us attend to this."

"No place for me?" Linda burst out. "What do you think I am, a doll? I can be as much help to Jack as you can!"

Vassall turned pale at the sound of the familiar name on her lips.

Garrod stood motionless, apparently neither seeing nor hearing.

"He's quiet enough now," said Jack rubbing his chin; "but you can't tell when he may break out again. A tent is no place to keep a madman. We'll have to tie him up, Vassall."

"Oh, we can't do that," murmured the other man. He all but wrung his hands. "This is too dreadful! Miss Linda, I beg of you! What will Sir Bryson say?"

Linda's eyes passed contemptuously over him. "What is there I can do?" she asked Jack.

"Find Jean Paul," he said.

As if evoked by the sound of his name, the half-breed issued at that moment from among the trees on

their left, and approached them. If his designs had miscarried, he gave no sign of it. One could hardly have guessed that he harboured designs. His face was as smooth as velvet, his manner calm, respectful, inquiring.

"W'at's the matter?" he asked. He looked at Garrod and appeared to comprehend with a start. "Ah, weh-ti-go!" he said, using the Cree word for madness. He shook his head in sober compassion. "I t'ink so me, before; many days he is act fonny."

It was perfection, and Jack was completely taken in. It seemed good to him to find some one quiet and capable. "He will have to be tied up and watched," said Jack. "He tried to launch me into the canyon."

"Wah! Wah!" exclaimed Jean Paul, holding up his hands at the thought. "I put him in my tent," he went on. "You and I all time watch him."

Thus Garrod was given in charge of Jean Paul, as Jean Paul had designed. He led him away, looking rather amused. White men were so easy to fool.

Jack went back for the gun, and to search up and down in case he might have dropped the precious note-book on the shore. Linda tagged after him, and Vassall followed Linda, because he could not support his bewilderment and dismay alone.

"What are you looking for?" Linda kept asking.

"Something I lost out of my pocket," Jack said; "a note-book." He could not bring himself to tell her more.

It was not there of course. The canyon had it long before this. When they returned to camp Humpy Jull was carrying lunch into the big tent. Linda commanded Jack to change his clothes and come and eat with them. He shook his head.

She stamped her foot. "You *must* come! Kate has to be told. We need you to hold us together. Kate!" she called out. "Make him come and have lunch with us."

Mrs. Worsley nodded and smiled from the door of the tent.

"Very well," said Jack. "One minute."

Then Linda perversely frowned and bit her lip because Kate could bring him with a nod, where she was unable to command.

It was not a cheerful meal that followed. Jack told Mrs. Worsley briefly what had happened, Vassall supplying a lamentable chorus. Mrs. Worsley took it with raised eyebrows and closed lips. Afterward Jack relapsed into silence. He had difficult matters of his own to think of. None of them knew of his intimate connection with Garrod, and it was impossible for him to speak to them of what concerned him so closely. Meanwhile the three talked as people always talk, of Garrod's strange behaviour during the last few days, and how anybody could have seen what was going to happen, if anybody had thought.

After they had come out of the tent, Jack saw Mary stroll through the trees on the westerly side of camp.

His eye brightened. Since they were back so soon they must have been successful. Mary quietly set to work to prepare their dinner. In a little while Davy appeared dragging the saddles.

"What have they been up to?" Linda said curiously. "They've been gone all morning."

"I suppose they have their own matters to attend to," Mrs. Worsley said, relieving Jack of the necessity of answering.

When a decent interval had elapsed Jack strolled over to the Cranston's fire. "Were you in time?" he asked casually.

Mary raised a face as controlled as his own. "Yes," she said. "We did what you told us."

"Did you meet the other party?" he asked anxiously.

She shook her head. "We found your raft," she said; "so we had plenty of time. We landed above Seven-Mile Creek, so they could not see the raft when they came up. After we had marked the posts we crossed the little stream, and came back on that side, as they went up the other. We heard them. The Indians would see our tracks of course, but Sir Bryson pays no attention to them."

"Good!" said Jack. "That has turned out all all right, anyway."

Mary searched his face, and a flash of anxiety appeared in her quiet eyes. "Something has happened here?" she said.

Jack nodded. His constricted breast welled up. Here was somebody he *could* tell. He did not reflect on the ambiguity of the situation. He only knew instinctively that he needed help, and that help was to be had in those deep eyes. However, he stuck to the bare facts of his narrative.

"There's a good deal beneath that," said Mary.

"Yes," he said. "I'll tell you when I can."

"You must let me help you," she said earnestly. "I understand the people so much better than you can."

"The people?" he said surprised.

"The natives," she said. "I think that Jean Paul is at the bottom of this."

Jack stared at her. This was quite a new thought to him. It required consideration.

Their further talk was prevented by the customary shrill hail from up river, announcing the return of the boat party. Travelling downstream, they were able to make ten miles an hour, consequently they arrived close on the heels of the Cranstons, who had left Seven-Mile Creek an hour before them.

Jack went back to the others at the door of the big tent. Linda received him sulkily, but he made believe not to be aware of it.

"Who will tell Sir Bryson?" murmured Vassall.

"I will," said Jack firmly. "I have to talk to him anyway."

"What about?" demanded Linda.

"Mining claims," said Jack "and other things!

There has to be a general showdown to-night." He spoke with affected carelessness, nevertheless his heart was beating at the thought of what he must go through with.

They looked at him questioningly.

"You may as well all know it," said Jack. "I am Malcolm Piers."

Before Mrs. Worsley and Vassall had time to recover from their stupefaction at this announcement, Sir Bryson and Baldwin Ferrie came striding from the river-bank. It appeared as if all Sir Bryson's river expeditions were doomed to disappointment. Again he was in a furious temper, and trying without success to conceal it. He passed inside the tent without noticing anybody. Baldwin Ferrie followed him. Jack, without waiting for a command, went in after them.

Sir Bryson flung himself into a chair, and opened up on Jack without any preliminaries. "You say you have worked up and down this pass," he said. "Did you ever hear the name Malcolm Piers?"

"Yes, sir," he said.

Sir Bryson leaned forward in his chair, and peered at Jack through squeezed-up eyes in a way that he intended to be magisterial and intimidating. "Where is this fellow now?" he barked.

Jack smiled a little grimly. "He is before you," he said quietly. "I am Malcolm Piers."

Sir Bryson fell back in his chair, and puffed. He

appeared to have suffered a sudden loss of motive power. "Well, well, I knew that," he said flatly. "But I didn't expect you to have the assurance to admit it to my face."

"I have no reason to conceal my name," said Jack.

Sir Bryson gradually worked himself up again. "No reason?" he cried. "You young blackguard! It was an honourable name until it descended to you! I ought to have guessed the truth from your intimacy with the details of these swindling operations. No reason? We'll see what the law has to say to that!"

"The law?" said Jack, quickly. "The money which I did not take has been paid into the bank. What has the law to do with it?"

Sir Bryson smiled disagreeably. "Apparently you do not know," he said, "that you are under indictment for grand larceny, and that your uncle, Mr. McInnes, directed his executors to see that you were prosecuted whenever you should be found."

This was a staggerer for Jack.

"Aha! that touches you!" said Sir Bryson. "That shakes your impudence, eh? Moreover, I do not think the province of Athabasca, of which I have the honour to be chief executive, will raise any obstacles to giving you up to the province of Quebec!"

Jack felt a little sick with helpless rage. He drew the mask of obstinacy over his face, and held his tongue. What could he say? It would only draw down their

ridicule for him to confess that the only witness to his innocence was an insane man.

He submitted to receive a long moral lecture in Sir Bryson's best vein. "Do you realize," the governor said in conclusion, "that as the head of this province it is my duty to put you under arrest, and hand you over to the authorities?"

Jack by this time had been goaded pretty far. "And so prevent me from filing my claim?" he said with a dangerous light in his eyes.

Sir Bryson swelled and puffed. "Tut!" he said. "Naturally the government does not intend that its valuable mining privileges shall fall into the hands of felons."

"I am not yet a felon," said Jack quietly; "and the three claims are not yet yours."

It was Sir Bryson's turn to grow red. There were no papers handy, and he fussed with his watch charm. "As to the other two claims," he said finally, "you have overreached yourself there. The notices on the posts are dated to-day, and it will be easy to prove that your friends could not have got there before we did to-day."

Jack found a momentary pleasure in describing to Sir Bryson how it had been done.

Naturally Sir Bryson was infuriated. "So it appears I have been harbouring a conspiracy!" he shouted.

"Nothing of the kind," said Jack. "The three claims were staked out before you came into the country.

Isn't the rest of the creek enough for you? There's plenty of pay dirt. I have worked for five years to find this place, and the best of it belongs to me by right."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Sir Bryson tremblingly. "Don't attempt to bandy words with me! You can go until I decide what is to be done with you!"

It occurred to Jack dimly that he was scarcely acting the part of prudence in thus exasperating his judge to the highest degree, and he cooled down. So they were not going to put him under restraint immediately. It would have been rather difficult anyway. With all his anger there was an uncandid look in the little governor's eye. Jack wondered what he was getting at. Suddenly the idea went through his mind that Sir Bryson hoped he might ride out of camp that night, and never show his face again. In other words, the unspoken proposal was: his liberty in exchange for his claims. Jack smiled a little at the thought, his fighting smile.

"What are you waiting for?" demanded Sir Bryson.

"I have something to tell you," Jack said, mildly. "Garrod ——"

"What about him?"

"He is very sick. He appears to have gone out of his mind."

"What nonsense is this?" puffed Sir Bryson.

"Mad, insane, crazy; whatever word you like," said Jack.

The little governor was startled out of his pomposity.

He turned to Baldwin Ferrie, plucking at his beard. For the moment he forgot his animosity against Jack, and asked him innumerable questions.

"Set you adrift?" he said, when Jack had told his tale. "What could have led him to do that?"

This was the moment Jack had been dreading. He drew a long breath, and, looking Sir Bryson in the eye, told him the whole story of himself and Frank Garrod. Sir Bryson, as Jack expected, sneered and pooh-poohed it throughout. On the face of it, it was a fantastic and improbable tale, but a disinterested person seeing Jack's set jaw and level eyes, and hearing his painstakingly detailed account, could scarcely have doubted he was telling the truth. Baldwin Ferrie was impressed, and he was not altogether disinterested.

"Lost the note-book, eh?" sneered Sir Bryson. "And you expect me to believe this on your unsupported word! Garrod's life has been exemplary!"

"Miss Trangmar saw me when I was cast adrift," said Jack patiently. "As to the rest, I think Garrod will bear me out, if he ever comes to his right senses. Why not have him in here now, and look him over? He may be better."

Sir Bryson was very much excited. He called Vassall into the tent, and the three men held a whispered consultation. Presently Linda came in, pale and charged with emotion. She headed directly for Jack. He fended her off with a look.

"If you give anything away, it will queer me for good with this crowd," he swiftly whispered.

She could not but perceive the force of this. A spasm passed over her face. Turning, she sat in a chair near the door, doing her best to look unconcerned.

When Sir Bryson saw her, he said: "We have important matters to discuss, my dear."

"It's only a tent," said Linda. "You can hear every word outside anyway."

"My dear ——" began Sir Bryson.

"I'm going to stay," said Linda tempestuously, and that was the end of it.

The upshot of the consultation was that Jack should be confronted with Garrod. Sir Bryson was opposed to it, but the other two overruled him. Vassall went off to get Garrod, and they waited.

Sir Bryson's table was toward the top of the tent, and as he sat he faced the door. He frowned, and tapped on the table and pulled his beard. Occasionally, in spite of himself, his eyes bolted. It was as if a horrible doubt kept recurring to him that the situation was getting too much for him; that he had stirred up more than he was able to settle. Jack stood to the right of the table, with his upper lip drawn in, his face as hard as a wall. Poor Jack had no ingratiating ways when he was put on the defensive. Mrs. Worsley stole into the tent, and, sitting beside Linda, took her trembling hand. Baldwin Ferrie bent over them, and

with a pale face whispered soothing things that they made no pretence of listening to.

At last Vassall pulled the tent flap back, and Garrod came in. He was well-brushed and tended. He walked without assistance, and his face was composed. Manifestly another change had taken place in him during the last few hours, a change for the better. Jack's heart began to beat more hopefully. There was still something queer about Garrod's eyes. Jean Paul Ascota and Vassall followed him in.

The half-breed constituted himself the sick man's nurse. Seeing a chair, he placed it for him at Sir Bryson's left, and Garrod sat down. Garrod had not greeted anybody on entering. Jean Paul stood over him watchful and solicitous. Mary's warning occurred to Jack, but what was he to do? The half-breed's attitude was irreproachable.

"I am sorry to hear that you have been very sick, Mr. Garrod," Sir Bryson began.

"Yes, sir," said Garrod composedly. "My head has been troubling me very much."

There was a curious, stiff quality in Garrod's voice, but that might easily have been accounted for by what he had been through. In spite of the man's apparent recovery, a dull anxiety that he could not explain, began to shape itself in Jack's breast.

"You are quite yourself again?" continued Sir Bryson.

"Yes, sir," said Garrod.

"Do you remember what happened this morning?"

"Yes, sir, up to a certain point. I had a shock."

"Um!" said Sir Bryson. "This man," pointing to Jack, "accuses you of setting him adrift in the current. Is it true?"

There was a slight pause before each of Garrod's answers. This time his hearers held their breaths.

"There is some mistake," he said composedly. "He was working in the boat, and it must have drifted off. I was asleep."

The pent-up breaths escaped. Jack turned a little paler, and set his teeth. He was not surprised; something had warned him of what was coming. Sir Bryson looked at his daughter.

"Linda, I understand that you were present," he said. "Did you see Mr. Garrod push the boat off?"

"He did it," she began excitedly. "I know he did it."

"I asked you if you *saw* him do it?" Sir Bryson said severely.

"No," she said sullenly. "It was already adrift when I came."

Sir Bryson, with a satisfied air, turned back to Garrod. "Do you know this man?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Garrod. "It is Malcolm Piers. We were friends years ago, before he ran away."

Jack looked at him with a kind of grim surprise.

"He claims," continued Sir Bryson, "that you were the only person who knew of his intention to leave

Montreal for good, and that after he had gone you took the money and let the theft be fastened on him. Is that true?"

There was the same tense pause while they waited for the answer.

"It is not true," said Garrod. "I knew he was going away, but I knew nothing about the money until the shortage was discovered." There was a pause, and then Garrod went on in his level, toneless voice, "I never accused him of taking it. I was the only one who stood up for him. You can ask anybody who worked in the bank."

A note of bitter laughter escaped from Jack.

Sir Bryson frowned. "He says," he went on, "that you wrote a statement this morning confessing that you took the money."

There was a longer pause before Garrod spoke. "Before or after the accident of the boat?" he asked.

Sir Bryson looked at Jack.

"Before," said Jack indifferently.

"It is not true," said Garrod. "I remember everything that happened up to that time."

Sir Bryson appealed to the company at large. "Surely we have heard enough," he said. "We have laid bare an impudent attempt on the part of this young man to fasten his crime on one whom he thought incapable of defending himself." He looked at Jack with the most terrible air he could muster. "Have you anything to say for yourself now?" he barked.

Jack screwed down the clamps of his self-control. "No," he said.

"Take Mr. Garrod back to your tent, then, Jean Paul," Sir Bryson said graciously. "Tend him well, and we will all be grateful."

Before any move was made the company was electrified by a new voice: "May I speak if you please, Sir Bryson?" They turned to see Mary Cranston standing within the door, resolute in her confusion.

Linda half rose with an exclamation. At the touch of Kate's hand she sank back, twisting her handkerchief into a rag, her lips trembling, her pained eyes darting from Mary's face to Jack's and back again.

Sir Bryson sneered. "Eavesdropping?" he said.

"I was listening," said Mary firmly. "It is good that I was. You are all blind!"

"Indeed!" said Sir Bryson jocularly, looking all around to share the joke. "Is it possible?"

Nobody laughed, however. Mary was not put out by his sneers. She pointed at Garrod. "He doesn't know what he's saying," she said. "His lips are speaking at the command of another mind! It is hypnotism! If you don't believe, look at him!"

The seven faces turned toward Garrod with a simultaneous start. Jean Paul's astonishment was admirably done.

"See by his eyes, his voice, the whole look of him!" Mary went on. "He doesn't even hear what I am saying now!"

None of those who looked could help but be struck by Garrod's extraordinary apathy. He sat, as he had continued to sit since he came in, looking before him with eyes devoid of all expression.

"Garrod!" said Sir Bryson sharply.

After the usual pause Garrod replied like an automaton without moving his eyes: "Yes, Sir Bryson?"

The governor was very much shaken. "Well, well," he stammered. "If it's hypnotism, who's doing it?"

Mary looked squarely at the man she accused. "Ask Jean Paul Ascota, the wonder-worker, the conjurer, the medicine man!"

Jean Paul started, and looked at her with a deprecating smile. From her he looked at Sir Bryson with the hint of a shrug, as much as to ask him to excuse her for what she was saying. It was almost too well done. Mary's eyes clung to him steadily, and any one who looked hard enough could have seen uneasiness behind the man's smiling mask. Sir Bryson, however, wished to be deceived.

He puffed and blew. "Preposterous!" he cried, casting his eyes around the little circle for support.

"Send Jean Paul away out of sight and hearing, and we will see if I am right," said Mary.

"I'll do no such thing," said Sir Bryson irritably. "We all know what your interest is in this case, my young lady. You are one of the beneficiaries of this young rascal's generosity!"

Jack suddenly came to life. He turned red, and

leaned threateningly over Sir Bryson's table. "Sir Bryson ——" he began with glittering eyes.

"Stop!" cried Mary in a voice that silenced Jack's own. "It is nothing to me what he thinks of me. I only want to see the truth come out!"

Only Kate Worsley's restraining arm kept Linda from jumping up. She was trembling all over.

"If there is any justice here you can't refuse to do what I ask," Mary continued, with her eyes fixed on Sir Bryson. It appeared that the quiet eyes could flash at need.

The little governor desired strongly to refuse. He pished, and pshawed, and fussed with his watch-chain, avoiding the disconcerting eyes. But the others in the tent were dead against him. They were of Anglo-Saxon stock, and an appeal to justice had been made. Sir Bryson could not support the silent opposition of his whole party.

"Very well, I suppose we must go through with the farce," he said pettishly. "Jean Paul, will you oblige me by stepping outside for a moment?"

"He must go as far away as the river bank," said Mary. "And some one must go with him."

"I'll go," said Vassall.

The two men went out.

"Now ask him questions," said Mary.

Garrod's eyes looked after Jean Paul uneasily. He half rose as if to follow. There was something inhuman in his aspect. Baldwin Ferrie laid a restraining hand

on his shoulder. All their hearts were beating fast as they watched and listened.

"Garrod, can — can you remember what happened this morning?" stammered Sir Bryson.

"I want to go," muttered Garrod.

"Frank, don't you know me?" asked Jack.

No reply.

"Frank, didn't you tell me you took the money?" Jack persisted.

Garrod's fingers pulled at his hanging lip, and the vacant eyes remained turned toward the door.

"Garrod, can't you hear me?" demanded Sir Bryson sharply.

"I must go," muttered Garrod.

It was a painful exhibition. The beholders were a little sickened, and none of them wished to prolong it. Baldwin Ferrie went to the opening to call Vassall and Jean Paul back.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Mary of Sir Bryson.

"Satisfied of nothing!" he snapped. "The man is out of his wits. I knew that before. We are just where we started!"

Mary's cheeks reddened with generous indignation. "Not quite," she said quickly. "You were going to believe what he said before. I have shown you that he was irresponsible then as well as now. Let me take care of him," she pleaded. "Perhaps I can nurse him back to his senses."

"Thank you," said Sir Bryson with a disagreeable



"He's not hers!" she cried hysterically

smile, "but I will see that Mr. Garrod has *disinterested* care."

Mary's eyes widened with alarm. "Not Jean Paul! After what I have shown you!"

Jean Paul had come in, and was bending solicitously over Garrod.

Sir Bryson glanced at them. "You have shown me nothing to his discredit," he said.

"You won't see anything but what you wish to see!" cried Mary indignantly. "Is this your justice, your disinterestedness?"

Sir Bryson lost his temper. "That will do!" he snapped rapping on the table. "I am the master here and I will do as I see fit. The truth is clear to all reasonable people," he went on, his eyes travelling around the circle again. "Of course I understand that to you and your lover ——"

He got no further. Linda sprang up like a released bowstring. "It's a lie!" she cried, her small white face working with passion.

"Linda! Linda!" implored Mrs. Worsley, following her aghast.

Linda thrust her away with a strength more than her own. "Let me alone!" she cried. "I won't be quiet any longer! I can't stand it!" She ran across the grass, and clung to Jack's arm, facing Mary. Gone were all the pretty affectations and refinements; this was the primitive woman. "He's not hers!" she cried hysterically. "He's mine! He's mine! She's

trying to take him from me by making believe to defend him. I can defend him as well as she can. I don't believe he's guilty either. I don't care if he is or not. I love him, and he loves me!"

A dreadful silence in the tent succeeded this outburst, broken only by Linda's tempestuous sobs. She hid her face on Jack's shoulder. His arm was around her; a man could do no less. Vassall and Ferrie turned away their heads, shamed and sick at heart to see the lady of their dreams so abase herself. Mrs. Worsley sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Mary Cranston, just now all alive, and warm and eager, turned to ice where she stood. Jack was fiery red and scowling like a pirate. For a second his eyes sought Mary's imploringly. Seeing no hope there, he stiffened his back, and drew on the old scornful, stubborn mask, letting them think what they chose. If he had had a moustache he would have twirled it in their faces. Sir Bryson was staring at his daughter clownishly.

Mary broke the silence. "I am sorry," she said, smoothly and clearly, "that the young lady has misunderstood my reasons for mixing myself in this. She need not distress herself any further. Malcolm Piers is nothing to me, nor I to him. If she still thinks I have any share in him, I cheerfully give it to her here and now."

With that she was gone. David Cranston would have

been proud of her exit. Not until after she had gone did any of those present realize the wonder of it, that as long as she had remained in the tent this native girl of less than twenty years had dominated them all.

Sir Bryson's faculties were completely scattered. His eyes were almost as blank as Garrod's; his hands trembled; his breathing was stertorous. Whatever his absurdities and weaknesses, at that moment the little man was an object worthy of compassion. Gradually his voice returned to him.

"Linda! How can you shame me so!" he murmured huskily. Then in a stronger voice: "Leave that man!" He turned to Kate Worsley. "Take her away."

The storm of Linda's passion passed with the departure of the other woman. She was now terrified by what she had done. She allowed herself to be led away, weeping brokenly.

Sir Bryson turned to Jack. "As for you, you young blackguard," he said tremulously, "you needn't expect to profit by this. If she persists in her infatuation she is no daughter of mine. But I'll save her if I can."

Jack's chin stuck out. He said nothing.

Jean Paul had listened to all this, outwardly shocked, but with the hint of a smirk playing around the corners of his lips. Fate was unexpectedly playing into his hands! He now looked at Sir Bryson for orders, and Sir Bryson, as if in answer, rose and said:

## XII

## JACK FINDS OUT

DINNER-TIME came and went at Camp Trangmar without any one's feeling much interested except the four Indian lads who ate largely, to the accompaniment of chatter and laughter by their own fire. It was nothing to them what high words were passed, and what tears were shed in the big tent. They were making the most of such a time of plenty as had never come their way before, and was not likely to be repeated.

By the cook-fire Humpy Jull exerted himself to tempt his hero's appetite — not wholly without success, it must be said; for what had happened could not check the coursing of the blood through Jack's veins. Twenty-five years old must be fed though the heavens fall. Gabriel's trumpet had better not be sounded for the young until after dinner. Jack ate silently and scowlingly. To one of his nature it was galling when there was so much to be overcome, not to be up and doing, not to be able to strike a blow.

Afterward the trees up the trail suffered for his wrath. Having eased his breast a little, he sat down to find a way out. Here, being a hewer instead of a

thinker, he was at a disadvantage. He was conscious of an anomaly somewhere. He was in perfect condition; to fill his chest, and to stretch his muscles afforded him a keen sting of pleasure, but wind and limb availed him nothing against the subtle moral complications that beset him. It was one thing to defy the government of Athabasca in a bold voice, and another thing to find a vulnerable spot to hit the creature.

He was sitting with his chin in his palms, considering this, when Kate Worsley approached him from behind, and spoke his name. He sprang up, scowling. Linda was waiting a little way off. "Good heavens!" he thought. "Another scene to go through with!"

Mrs. Worsley was always simple in manner, and direct of speech. "Jack," she said at once, "Linda has told me everything that has happened between you, and I do not blame you as much as I did at first."

"Thanks," he said, looking away, and speaking gruffly as he was obliged to do when he was moved. "I value your good opinion, Mrs. Worsley. I don't think of you like the others."

"I am taking you into my confidence," she went on. "I am in a difficult position. Linda is terribly distressed by what has happened. She begged so to be allowed to see you for a moment, that I was afraid if I refused — well, I have brought her on my own responsibility. You will not say anything to her to make me sorry I brought her, will you?"

"You needn't be afraid," said Jack. "Nor Sir

Bryson. I can't say it properly, but I shall not have anything to do with her until I can come out in the open."

"I knew you felt that way," she said quietly. "Of course it's no use telling Sir Bryson in his present state of mind."

"He hates me," said Jack frowning. "His kind always does. He won't give me a chance, and I say things that only make matters worse." He rubbed his furrowed forehead with his knuckle. "It's a rotten, mixed-up mess, isn't it?" he said with an appealing look.

Her eyes softened. His strength and his weakness appealed alike to the woman in her. Her hand went out impulsively. "You boy!" she said. "It's no wonder!"

Jack, wondering what was no wonder, grabbed her hand, and pressed it until she winced.

"If I can help you, come to me," she said.

"Thanks, anyway," he said. "But nobody can, I suspect."

"Now talk to Linda," she said. "Be gentle with her."

Jack frowned. "I told her not to say anything," he began.

"I know, I know," she said cajolingly. "But you are strong; be merciful with her weakness. Make allowances for women's nerves and emotions. It was a terrible scene on us all; most of all on her. She was

foolish; but there was a kind of bravery, too, in avowing you before them all. Think of that!"

"If she only had your sense," said Jack.

Kate smiled and turned away. "What do you expect?" she said over her shoulder. "I'm thirty-eight years old, and I was always plain! Linda!" she called. "Three minutes only, remember." She walked away.

Linda came running, and cast herself in Jack's arms, weeping, protesting, scarcely coherent. "Oh, Jack! I had to see you! I was terrified, thinking of your anger! That woman enrages me so! I can't think! What did you give her a mining-claim for? If you'd only love me more, I wouldn't be so jealous of her. I didn't mean to injure you! You know I'd never do that! Don't be angry with me. I've disgraced myself forever with them, and if you go back on me too, what will I do?"

What was he to do with the helpless, contrite little thing but comfort her? His arms closed around her. "Who says I'm going back on you?" he muttered gruffly.

"It's no more than I deserve after disobeying you," she went on. "I was such a fool! I'm so sorry! Say you forgive me, Jack. I'll do better after this!"

"I can't forgive you right away," he said with his awkward honesty. "But I'm not going back on anything. Don't distress yourself like this. Everything will come right."

"But love me a little," she begged, lifting her tear-stained face.

He put her away not ungently. "We mustn't," he said.

"Why?" she asked, gripping his arm.

"I promised Mrs. Worsley."

"What did you promise?"

"Oh, you know," he said uncomfortably. "Don't you see that if there is any — well, love-making between us, it makes me out a villain to them?"

"No, I don't see it," she said. "Not if I make you."

Jack began to sense that father and daughter had an exasperating trait in common, the inability to see a thing they did not wish to see. "I should be blamed, anyway," he said.

"But I'll tell everybody the truth," she said. "I'm not ashamed of you. They shall see that I have chosen you of my own free will."

"You have done harm enough," said Jack grimly. "Better not say anything more."

"I don't care," she whimpered. "I've got to love you."

Jack's face became hard. "I *do* care," he said. "Understand, we have got to cut all this out. No one, not even a woman, can make me do what I don't choose to do."

"Jack, don't speak to me like that," she murmured terrified.

"You brought it on yourself," he said miserably.

"You always seem to make me stubborn and hateful."

"But you do love me?" she said desperately.

He inwardly groaned. "I'm not going back on anything," he said lamely.

"That's not enough," she said, beginning to tremble again. "It would kill me if you didn't. They'll never have anything to do with me again. I have no one but you. You must love me. You do love me, don't you?"

"Of course I love you," he said with a strange sinking of the heart.

"Then I'll do whatever you tell me," she said submissively.

"No more talks off by ourselves," said Jack. "And around camp you must treat me exactly the same as the other men."

"But if you shouldn't succeed in proving ——" she began.

"I *will*," said Jack.

"Time's up, Linda," said Kate, coming back.

Linda kissed him in spite of himself, and hurried away. Jack breathed a sigh of relief, and took up his axe again.

At the top of the bench a few hundred yards from where Jack was working, the trail from over the portage divided. One branch came down to Camp Trangmar and the river; the other turned west along the edge of the bench, and became the Fort Erskine trail.

A mile or two up the valley the latter was joined by the trail that led directly west from Camp Trangmar.

As Jack stood breathing himself after a spell of chopping, he became aware of the sound of horses' footfalls coming along the Fort Erskine trail. There was no sound of a bell. Struck by this fact, he bent his head to listen attentively. It is exceptional for the horses to stray away from the one of their number who is belled. Moreover, to Jack's experienced ears, these had the sound of laden horses. He could not guess who it might be, but Indians or whites, they would hardly ride so near to Camp Trangmar without coming in, unless they had a reason to avoid observation. He therefore dropped his axe, and ran up the hill to intercept whoever was coming, and make them account for themselves.

At the forks of the trail to his astonishment he came face to face with Mary and Davy mounted, and leading their two pack-horses. The bell of the leading horse had been silenced with a wisp of grass. At the sight of Jack they pulled up in obvious embarrassment. Jack's heart went down like a stone in deep water.

"You're pulling out?" he faltered.

"What else was there for us to do?" said Mary coldly.

"Without telling me?" cried Jack reproachfully.

"*I* didn't want to," put in Davy eagerly. "Mary said we had to."

Pride, indignation, and exquisite discomfort struggled

in Mary's face. "It seemed easier," she said. "I'm sorry we met you. There's nothing to say!"

"But Mary — Mary!" urged Jack, scarcely knowing what he said, but filled with his need of her. "Not like this! Wait until to-morrow. Who knows what may happen to-morrow!"

"What can happen?" said Mary. "More humiliating scenes?"

Jack caught her bridle rein. "I swear to you," he said, "if Sir Bryson or any of the men ——"

"I'm not thinking of them," Mary interrupted. "You can't stop *her* tongue. You've given her the right to speak that way."

Jack hung his head. Like a man under the circumstances he muttered: "You're pretty hard on a fellow."

"Hard?" cried Mary sharply. "What do you think I ——" She checked herself with an odd smile.

Jack was determined to be aggrieved. "It's unfriendly," he burst out; "stealing out of camp by a roundabout way like this and even muffling your bell."

"That's what I said!" put in Davy.

Mary flashed a hurt look at Davy that forgave him while she accused. That he should take sides against her at such a moment — but of course he was only a child. She was silent. Swallowing the lump in her throat, she looked away over the little valley and the river for support. All three of them looked at the lovely scene below them, softened and silvered in the

creeping twilight, each wondering miserably what had happened to the joy of life.

At last Mary said quietly: "It wasn't easy to decide what to do. I have to think of myself. I have to think of father, what he would like. There is nothing else. I am sorry. You and I cannot be friends. We might as well make up our minds to it."

"Why can't we be?" demanded Jack.

"Because you have chosen a girl that will not allow you to have another woman for a friend," she said.

This was unanswerable. Jack could only hang his head again.

"I will not be friends with you secretly," Mary went on. "Nor can I lay myself open to her abuse. So we must not see each other any more."

"I need you!" Jack blurted out. His pride was hauled down. It was the first appeal for help that had passed his lips.

"I — I'm sorry," she faltered, but without relenting. "Watch Jean Paul well," she went on. "He can't keep the man hypnotized always. Get Garrod away from him if you can."

Jack scarcely heard. "I'm under arrest," he said. "You're leaving me without a friend in camp."

"You have her," said Mary softly, with an indescribable look; compassion, reproach or disdain — or all three.

"Mary!" he burst out.

She jerked her bridle rein out of his hand, and

clapped heels to her horse's ribs. "This does no good," she muttered. "And it hurts! Come, Davy." She loped out of sight among the trees.

Davy lingered. Leaning out of the saddle he put his arm around Jack's shoulders. The boy was near tears. "Jack, what's the matter?" he begged to know. "I want to stay. I feel so bad about it. I don't understand. Why can't we be friends like we were before? Mary won't tell me anything. We think such a heap of you, Jack. The other girl — she's nothing to you, is she? Mary's worth a dozen of her. There's nobody like Mary. Why can't you and Mary ——"

This was like a knife turned in Jack's breast. "Get along with you!" he said harshly. "You don't know what you're talking about." Disengaging himself from the boy's arm, he clapped the horse's haunch, and the animal sprang ahead. The pack-horses lumped after.

When they were out of sight Jack flung himself full length in the grass with his face in his arms. Now he knew. This pain in his breast was the thing they called love. Blind fool that he had been, he had dismissed her with the light term "native girl," and had not seen that it was a woman in a thousand, the woman his manhood had always been unconsciously yearning for, generous, true and lovely. She rode away, dragging his heart after her. He was tied fast. The pain of it was insupportable.

"Good God! how did I ever get into it!" he groaned. "What a price to pay for a kiss in the dark!"

## XIII

## THE RETREAT

TWO days passed at Camp Trangmar. There was little outward evidence of the several storms that agitated the breasts of the company. The men left Jack severely alone, and Jack for his own part took care to keep out of Linda's way. He made it his business to watch Garrod, visiting him night and day in Jean Paul's tent, careless of the owner. There was no change in Garrod's condition. Jean Paul sheered off at Jack's approach like the wary animal he was. Meanwhile Sir Bryson, Baldwin Ferrie, and the Indians were busy staking out additional claims along Tetrahedron creek.

On the third morning the camp was plunged into a fresh agitation. Jack and Humpy Jull were breakfasting by the cook-fire, Jack looking like a sulky young Olympian in the morning sunlight, and Humpy naïvely trying to cheer him up.

"Gosh!" he said. "If I had your looks and figger I wouldn't care about nothin'."

Jack, who disdained the false modesty that disclaims such tributes with a simper, merely held out his plate for porridge.

Suddenly Vassall came quickly across the grass. His face was pale and streaked from the effects of nervous emotion.

"Sir Bryson wants you," he said to Jack.

Jack continued to eat leisurely. "What about?" he asked, coolly. "I've no mind to stand up and be abused again."

"Garrod is gone," said Vassall.

Jack's indifference vanished like sleight of hand. He sprang up. "Gone!" he echoed.

He headed straight for the big tent, Vassall following, and Humpy Jull looking after them both with round eyes.

The inside of the big tent presented evidences of confusion. Breakfast was spread on the two little tables pushed together, and Linda, Mrs. Worsley, and Baldwin Ferrie were seated, playing with their food. Sir Bryson's chair was pushed back, and his napkin lay on the grass. The little man was agitatedly walking up and down. Jean Paul stood by with a deferential air.

This time Linda gave no sign at Jack's entrance except for an access of self-consciousness.

"What do you know about this?" Sir Bryson immediately demanded.

"I know nothing," Jack said. "I have come to find out."

"Garrod has escaped," said Sir Bryson.

"Why not?" said Jack bitterly. "He ought to have been secured."

Jean Paul spoke up. "I get no order to tie him," he said smoothly. "He all time ver' quiet. I mak' him sleep inside me, and I tie a buckskin lace from him to me. If he move a little I wake. This morning when I wake, the lace cut and him gone."

"Did you let him keep a knife, too?" asked Jack, sneering.

Jean Paul looked confused. "He got no knife w'en I look on him," he said.

"It sounds fishy," said Jack scornfully.

"Do you mean to imply ——" began Sir Bryson.

"Jean Paul sleeps like a cat," Jack went on. "If so much as a stick turns in the fire he wakes and looks to see. Follow it out for yourselves. He can't keep the man hypnotized forever. And once Garrod comes to his senses, the truth comes out!"

"These are empty accusations," puffed Sir Bryson. "The poor fellow has wandered away in his distraction."

"Or been carried," Jack amended.

"By whom?" said Sir Bryson. "We're all here."

"There are Sapi Indians a few miles west," said Jack. "Jean Paul is a power in the tribe."

"Excuse me, your excellency," purred Jean Paul, "if I do this, I not stay be'ind myself me, to get your punishment."

"Make you mind easy, Jean Paul," said Sir Bryson graciously. "This fellow attempts to twist everything that happens, to his own advantage. I commend your ingenuity, young sir," he added sarcastically.

"We're wasting time!" cried Jack with an impatient gesture. "He's got to be found! Whatever you choose to think of me, you can safely leave that in my hands. It means more to me than to any one else. It means everything to me to find him."

"Jean Paul says the horses have strayed ——" Sir Bryson began.

"The horses, too?" cried Jack. The half-breed's eyes quailed under the fiery question that Jack's eyes bent on him. Without another word Jack turned and ran out of the tent.

In half an hour he was back — with a grim face. The occupants of the big tent were much as he had left them, but Jack sensed from the increased agitation of their faces, and from Jean Paul's sleekness, that the half-breed had not failed to improve the interval.

"It's true," said Jack shortly. "They've been driven off."

It had a terrifying sound to them. They looked at him with wide eyes.

"I found their tracks on the Fort Erskine trail," Jack went on. "They were travelling at a dead run. The tracks were six hours old."

Sir Bryson stopped his pacing. "Driven off?" he said agitatedly. "Are you sure? Couldn't they have run off by themselves?"

"They could," said Jack, "but they didn't. "Five

of the horses were hobbled when we turned them out. The hobbles had been removed."

"Well, well," stammered Sir Bryson, "what are we to do?"

"Let me take ten days' grub from the store," said Jack "I'll undertake to bring Garrod back, and at least some of the horses."

"You'd follow on foot?" Linda burst out.

Jack answered to Sir Bryson. "They can't travel fast with their families and baggage."

It was not Jack's safety that Sir Bryson was concerned about. "But — but, leave us here without horses?" he faltered.

Jack smiled a little. "What good am I to you? I'm under arrest. Jean Paul has your ear. Why won't he do?"

Sir Bryson gave no sign of hearing this. "We must return," he said nervously. "We can't stay here — without horses."

Jack's heart sank. "What have the horses got to do with it?" he asked. "You're safe here. You've grub enough for months."

Sir Bryson looked at the half-breed. "Jean Paul says perhaps it is the Indians," he said. "He thinks they may have driven off the horses as a preliminary to attacking us."

"I not say that, me," put in Jean Paul quickly. "I jus' say best to be ready."

"So that's his game," cried Jack scornfully. "He's

fooling you! It's an old redskin trick to drive off the horses to prevent pursuit. But as to standing up to white men — well, I'm willing to go and take my man and my horses away from the whole village of them."

Sir Bryson violently shook his head. Jack saw that the fate of Garrod had little weight with him. "We are quite defenceless!" he cried. "And with the women to look after! It is my duty to start back!"

Jack's lip curled.

Sir Bryson's voice scaled up shrilly. "How will we ever get back?" he cried.

"That's easy," said Jack. "Twelve miles walk over the portage to Fort Geikie, then by raft down the river. We'll make it in two days."

"Can we start this morning?"

Jack flushed. "No!" he cried. "Abandon our outfit! That would be disgraceful. It would be the joke of the country. I won't be a party to it! We'll cache the stuff to-day, and you can start to-morrow."

"Very well," said Sir Bryson nervously. "In the meantime we must keep a sharp lookout!"

Before Jack left him he made another appeal to be allowed to go after Garrod. He might as well have saved his breath. Sir Bryson and those with him, except perhaps Mrs. Worsley, were in the grip of panic. It was futile to try to reassure those whose notions of Indians had been gathered from the Wild West fiction of a preceding generation.

Jack came out of the tent sore all the way through. Taking them down to the Fort would cost him five precious days. True, he could get horses there, and perhaps assistance if he needed it, but the waste of five days was maddening.

Jack thought for a moment of defying Sir Bryson, and going anyway. But he put it from him. Any white man who abandoned a party that he had bound himself to guide, no matter what the circumstances might be, would be disgraced forever in the North. It is a situation which simply does not admit of argument. This sense of guide-responsibility is strong among white men, because the natives are without it. They are prone to shuffle off disagreeable burdens on the slightest provocation.

Jack set to work with a sullen will. He took out his soreness in hard work and in making the Indian lads work. Hard and long-continued exertion was a disagreeable novelty to them; before many hours had passed they were sullen too.

An axe party was immediately dispatched into the bush, and by noon enough stout poplar logs were cut and trimmed and drawn into camp to make a small shack. By supper-time the walls were raised, and the roof of poles laid and covered with thick sods. The remaining hours of daylight were occupied in storing everything they possessed inside. It was ten o'clock before they knocked off work. Meanwhile Sir Bryson, to Jack's scornful amusement, had insisted

on posting Vassall and Ferrie as outposts against a surprise.

Next morning the governor was plunged into a fresh panic by the loss of the four Indian lads. No one saw them go. They melted out of camp, one by one, and were seen no more. Jack was not greatly surprised; he had seen premonitory symptoms the day before. It was additional evidence to him that the other Indians were still in the neighbourhood, and he was more than ever chagrined to be obliged to retreat without even an attempt to recover Garrod.

Jack kept out of Sir Bryson's way. In spite of themselves, however, the white men leaned on Jack more and more. Their imaginary redskin peril strengthened the race feeling, and Jack's energy and resourcefulness were indispensable to them. They came to him sheepishly for aid, but they came.

"What do you make of this desertion?" Vassall asked anxiously.

"Nothing serious," said Jack. "I don't think Jean Paul has a hand in it, because it's his game to get us out as quickly as he can. They probably vamoosed of their own accord. When we lost the horses, they saw the end of their good times. They've been fed too high. It makes 'em beany, like horses."

"But what'll we do without them?" Vassall asked.

Jack guessed that the question came from Sir Bryson.

"Tell the old gentleman to keep his shirt on," he said.

"They're no great loss. It means that we'll all have to carry a little more across the portage, that's all."

After breakfast the tents were taken down and stored with the last of the camp impedimenta in the cache. When everything had been put inside, the door was fastened with a hasp and staple removed from one of the boxes, and Jack pocketed the key. The loads were then apportioned and packed, a long job when six of the eight were totally inexperienced. Sir Bryson was still looking over his shoulder apprehensively. At eleven o'clock they finally set out.

It was a quaintly assorted little procession that wound in single file along the firmly beaten brown trail through the willow scrub and among the white-stemmed poplars. There was a lieutenant-governor carrying a pack, and striving ineffectually to maintain his dignity under it; and there was his daughter likewise with a blanket strapped on her shoulders, and an olive-wood jewel-case in her hand, with a gold clasp. Jack smiled a little grimly at the idea of a jewel-case being toted through the bush.

Everybody carried a pack conformable to his strength. Since the two women and Sir Bryson could take so little, the others were fairly well laden. Jean Paul at the head, and Jack bringing up the rear, toted the lion's share. Besides blankets, the outfit consisted of food sufficient for five days, cooking and eating utensils, guns, ammunition, and axes. Jack had a coil of light rope to aid in building his raft.

Jack put Vassall next behind Jean Paul, with a word in his ear to watch the half-breed. Jack felt, somehow, that no serious harm was likely to befall Garrod so long as he had Jean Paul safely under his eye. After Vassall the others strung along the trail, with Humpy Jull, the oddest figure of all, marching in front of Jack, looking like an animated tinware shop with his pots and pans hanging all over him.

They started in good enough spirits, for the sun was shining, and the packs felt of no weight at all. But on the little hills their legs inexplicably caved in; their breath failed them, and the burdens suddenly increased enormously in weight. It was a long time since hard labour had caused Sir Bryson to perspire, and the novel sensation afforded him both discomfort and indignation. Two miles an hour was the best they could do, counting in frequent pauses for rest. The twelve miles stretched out into an all-day affair.

Once, toward the end of the afternoon, they came to the bank of a small stream, and throwing off their burdens, cast themselves down in the grass beside it, all alike and equal in their weariness. Sir Bryson was no longer a knight and a governor, but only the smallest man of the party, rather pathetic in his fatigue. They were too tired to talk; only Jack moved about restlessly. The slowness of the pace had tired him more than the seventy-five pounds he carried.

As Jack passed near Kate and Linda the latter said petulantly: "I'm tired, Jack. I want to talk to you."

Jack's heart sank, but nothing of it showed in his face. The little thing's look of appeal always reproached him. To a man of his type there is something shameful and wrong in not being able to give a woman more than she looks for. "Lord! it's not her fault," he would tell himself; and "As long as I'm going through with it, I must make a good job of it!" So he plumped down beside her.

"Go as far as you like," he said with a kind of hang-dog facetiousness. "Everybody can see, and Mrs. Worsley is standing guard."

"But I'm tired," she repeated. "I want to put my head on your shoulder." She looked at the spot she had chosen.

Jack became restive. "Easy there," he said uncomfortably. "You're forgetting the compact!"

Linda's eyes slowly filled with tears. "Hang the compact," she said. "I'm tired."

"I'll carry your blanket the rest of the way," Jack said gruffly.

"I won't let you," she said. "You've got a perfectly enormous load already."

"Pshaw! that featherweight won't make any difference," he said, and tied it to his pack.

"My feet hurt me," wailed Linda.

Jack frowned at the elegant little affairs Linda called her "sensible" shoes. "No wonder," he said. "Trying to hit the trail on stilts. Put out your foot."

His axe lay near. Firmly grasping her ankle, with

a single stroke he guillotined the greater part of the elevating heel. Linda and Kate both screamed a little at the suddenness of the action, and Linda looked down horrified, as if she expected to see the blood gush forth. Jack laughed, and performed a like operation on the other foot. For the next hundred yards she swore she could not walk at all, but the benefit of the amputation gradually became apparent.

Never was such a long twelve miles. Finally, when most of them had given up hope of ever making an end to this journey, they debouched on the grassy esplanade surrounding the shacks of Fort Geikie. Humpy Jull set about getting dinner, while Jack and Jean Paul cut poplar saplings and constructed a leafy shelter for Linda and Kate. The business of camp had to be carried on; no one seeing these people travelling, and eating together, and sleeping around the same fire, could have guessed how their hearts were divided.

They were ready for sleep immediately after eating. Linda and Kate disappeared, and the men rolled up in their blankets, Sir Bryson grumbling. He felt that another little shelter should have been made for him. He found it very trying to be obliged to snore in public among his servants.

Sir Bryson insisted that a watch be maintained throughout the night, and Jack, who would have laughed at any other time, fell in with the idea, because he had a notion that Jean Paul might try to slip away.

Jack arranged therefore that the half-breed keep the first watch, and, at no little pain and difficulty, he remained awake himself to watch Jean Paul. At eleven Jean Paul wakened Humpy Jull; at one, Vassall took Humpy's place.

Jack had left instructions that he was to be roused at three. It was already broad day at this hour. Upon Vassall's touch he staggered to his feet under the burden of sleep and walked blindly up and down until he had shaken it off. He went to the edge of the bank to take a prospect, Vassall at his elbow. A better understanding was coming about between these two. Vassall made no pretence that he had forgiven Jack for burglarizing Linda's affections, as he thought, but granting that, he, Vassall, was doing all he could do to bear his share of their common burden.

A lovely panorama of river, islands, and hills lay before them in the cool, pure, morning light.

"I'm going to cross to the island," Jack said, pointing. "In the drift-pile on the bar there, there's dry wood enough for a dozen rafts."

"How will you get over there?" asked Vassall.

"Swim," said Jack.

"I'll go along, too."

Jack stared at the slender, pale young city man. "You!" he said with a not very flattering intonation.

"Hang it, I'm not going to let you do everything," Vassall said, frowning. "I can swim. It's one of the few things I can do that is useful up here."

"It's not so much of a swim," said Jack. "The current carries us. I'll tow the axe on a stick or two. But the water's like ice."

"I can stand if it you can," Vassall said doggedly.

Jack looked at him with a gleam of approval. "Come on and feed then," he said off-hand.

They wakened Baldwin Ferrie to stand the last watch, and sat down to the cold victuals Humpy had left for them. In front of them the other men still slept, an odd sight, the three of them rolled up like corpses in a row in the morning light: lieutenant-governor, half-breed, and cook, as much alike as three trussed chickens.

While Jack ate, he issued his instructions to Ferrie: "Wake Humpy at five, and tell him to get a move on with breakfast. As soon as Vassall and I knock the raft together, we'll cross back to this side, but the current will carry us down about a third of a mile. When the rest of you have finished eating, pack up and come down to the shore. You'll have to walk along the stones to the first big point on this side. Bald Point, they call it, because of the trees being burned off. Lose no time, because we must be started by eight, if we mean to make Fort Cheever by dark."

Jack and Vassall, clad only in shirt, trousers, and moccasins, scrambled down the steep bank to the water's edge. Vassall looked at the swirling green flood with a shiver.

"Tie your moccasins around your neck," Jack said.

"Leave your other things on. They'll soon dry as we work around. Head straight out into midstream, and you'll find the current will ground you on the point of the bar below."

The water gripped them with icy fingers that squeezed all the breath out of their lungs. Vassall set his teeth hard, and struck out after Jack. They were both livid and numb when they finally landed, and Jack forced Vassall to run up and down the bar with him, until the blood began to stir in their veins again. Then they attacked the tangled pile of drift logs.

Eight bleached trunks as heavy as they could pry loose and roll down to the water's edge provided the displacement of the raft. Jack chopped them to an equal length, and laced them together with his rope. On these they laid several cross-pieces, and on the cross-pieces, in turn, a floor of light poles, the whole stoutly lashed together. The outfit was completed by two roughly hewn sweeps and a pair of clumsy trestles in which to swing them. They were greatly handicapped by the lack of an auger and of hammer and nails, and the result of their labour was more able than shipshape. Four strenuous hours went to the making of it.

"She'll hold," said Jack at last, "if we don't hit anything."

They pushed off, and each wielding a sweep, pulled her back toward the shore they had started from. They both watched her narrowly, not a little proud

of their handiwork. At least she floated high and dry, and answered, though sluggishly, to the sweeps. Their common feeling made Jack and Vassall quite friendly for the moment.

The little group was already waiting for them on the stones, with the slender baggage. Apprehension is quicker than the physical senses. Before he could see what was the matter, Jack sensed that something had happened, and a sharp anxiety attacked him. As he and Vassall drew near the shore he scanned the waiting group closely; he counted them, and then it became clear! There were only five waiting instead of six!

"Where's Jean Paul?" he cried out.

The people on the shore looked at each other uncomfortably. There was no answer until the raft grounded on the stones. Then Sir Bryson drew himself up and puffed out his cheeks.

"He asked my permission to remain to search for poor Garrod," he said in his most hoity-toity manner. "And I thought best to accede to his request."

Jack's jaw dropped. For an instant he could not believe his ears. Then he slowly turned white and hard. So this was what he got for spending his strength in their service! This was what he had to deal with: folly and self-sufficiency that passed belief! He was angrier than he had ever been in his life before. He was much too angry to speak. He stepped ashore, and walked away from them, struggling with himself.

Sir Bryson strutted and puffed and blew for the

benefit of all observers. His secret dismay was none the less apparent. None looked at him. They were gazing fearfully at Jack's ominous back.

He came back with a set, white face. "Sir Bryson," he said in a voice vibrating with quiet, harsh scorn, "I say nothing about myself. Apart from that I've shown you clearly, and these people are witnesses to it, that this half-breed means Garrod no good. So be it. If he does for him now, it will be on your head."

In spite of his bluster, Sir Bryson began to look like a frightened small boy.

Linda was weeping with anger and fright. "I told him," she said, "but he wouldn't listen to me."

Kate, fearful of another outburst, laid a restraining hand on her.

"Here's your raft," Jack went on harshly. "All you have to do is to sit on it and keep it in the middle of the river and you'll be at Fort Cheever before dark. After letting the breed go, the least you can do is to let me stay and watch him."

They all cried out against this, even Kate and Vassall, whom Jack thought he could count on a little. They all spoke at once in confused tones of remonstrance and alarm. "What would we do without you? We don't know the river. We can't handle a raft," and so on.

Above all the others Sir Bryson's voice was heard trembling with alarm and anger: "Would you desert us here?"

The word brought the blood surging back into Jack's face. "Desert nothing," he said. I asked your permission. I do not desert. Get aboard everybody, and hand on the bundles!"

They scrambled at his tone, a good deal like sheep. Jack launched the raft with a great heave of his back, running out into the water, thigh deep. Clambering on board, he picked up a sweep, and brought her around in the current. Sir Bryson and the others stole disconcerted sides glances at his hard and bitter face. There is something very intimidating in the spectacle of a righteous anger pent in a strong breast. The spectator is inclined to duck his head, and wonder where the bolt will fall.

## XIV

## BEAR'S FLESH AND BERRIES

JACK propelled the raft into the middle of the current, and, taking the sweep aboard, sat down on the end of it with his back to the others, and nursed his anger. They sat or lay on the poles in various uneasy positions. Sir Bryson, who, until the the day before, had probably not been obliged to sit in man's originally intended sitting position for upward of thirty years, felt the indignity keenly.

Every one's nerves were more or less stretched out of tune. Linda, watching Jack's uncompromising back with apprehensive eyes, was exasperated past bearing by her father's fretful complaints.

"What do you want?" she burst out. "A padded chair? Don't be ridiculous, father!"

Sir Bryson swelled and snorted. "That is no way to speak to your father, Belinda. Because you see me robbed of my outward and visible dignity is no reason for your forgetting the respect you owe me. I am surprised at you."

Linda's muttered reply was forcible and inelegant. None of the others paid any attention. Sir Bryson, feeling perhaps that a magisterial air accorded ill

with his tousled hair and his cross-legged position, made a bid for sympathy instead.

"My feet are going to sleep," he said plaintively.

Jack, overhearing, was reminded again of the resemblance between father and daughter. "You don't have to sit still," he said, speaking over his shoulder. "You can move about as long as you don't all get on the same side at the same time."

Sir Bryson, who would not have been robbed of his grievance for any consideration, continued to sit and suffer dramatically.

Vassall's head was heavy. Stretching himself out, and watching Linda wistfully, he finally fell asleep. Humpy Jull, up at the bow — if a raft may be said to have a bow — constructed a fishing line out of a bent pin and a moccasin lace, and baiting it with a morsel of bacon, fished for hours with the trusting confidence of a child. Discouraged at last, he fell asleep beside Vassall.

Thus the morning passed. Left to its own devices, the raft swung around and back in the eddying current, and a superb panorama was ceaselessly and slowly unrolled for any who cared to see. The river moved down through its vast trough in the prairie, and an ever-changing vista of high hills, or seeming hills, hemmed them in. On the southerly side the hills were timbered for the most part. On the northerly side, where the sun beat all day, the steep slopes were bare, and the rich grass made vivid velvety effects darkened

in the hollows and touched with gold on the knolls. The whole made a green symphony, comprising every note in the scale of green from the sombre spruce boughs up through the milky emerald of the river water to the high verdancy of the sunny grass and the delicate poplar foliage.

Of them all only Kate Worsley watched it as if the sight was enough to repay one for the discomfort of sitting on poles. Her quiet eyes were lifted to the hills with the look of one storing away something to remember.

Now and then a momentary excitement was created by the sight of a bear grubbing about the roots of the poplar saplings, homely, comical beasts with their clumsy ways and their expression of pretended cuteness. Something still wild in the breasts of domesticated creatures like ourselves never fails to answer to the sight of a real wild thing at home in his own place. Since they had no time to go ashore in case of a hit, no shots were fired.

Once in the middle of the day they landed long enough for Jack to build a hearth of flat stones on Humpy's end of the raft, and cover it with clay. Then, gathering a little store of wood, they pushed off again, and Humpy built his fire, and boiled his kettle while they floated down.

After lunch Jack's anger was no longer sufficient to keep his neck stiff. He had been up since three that morning, and in spite of himself he began

to nod. Vassall volunteered to keep watch while he slept.

"There's nothing to do as long as she keeps the middle of the stream," Jack said. "If she drifts to one side or the other wake me."

He stretched himself out, and in spite of the cobbly nature of his bed, immediately fell asleep. Linda watched him with the tears threatening to spring. He had not spoken to her since they started, and indeed had scarcely seemed to be aware of her. She glanced at the others with rebellious brows. If it were not for them, she thought, the tawny head might be pillowed in her lap.

Another hour dragged out its slow length. Kate Worsley out of pity for Sir Bryson's increasing peevishness proposed a game of bridge. It was hailed with alacrity. A sweater was spread for a cloth; Sir Bryson, Kate, Baldwin Ferrie, and Vassall squatted around it, and the cards were dealt.

"Fancy!" exclaimed Vassall, looking around. "Rather different from a game in the library at Government House, eh?"

"And different looking players," suggested Kate with a smile.

"I feel it very keenly, Mrs. Worsley," said Sir Bryson tearfully. "I have always attached great importance to the little details of one's personal appearance. Perhaps it is a weakness. But that is the way I am."

"We're all in the same boat — I mean raft," said Mrs. Worsley cheerfully. "Look at me!"

"I will make it no trumps," said Baldwin Ferrie.

Linda, seeing the others fully occupied, moved nearer to Jack, and lay down where, making believe to be asleep herself, she could watch his face, calm and glowing in sleep, the lashes lying on his cheeks, the thin nostrils, the firm, red line of his lips. If he had only slept with his mouth open, or had snored, it might have broken the spell that held her, and a deal of trouble been saved. Unfortunately he slept beautifully; and if that was not enough, once he smiled vaguely like a sleeping baby, and changed his position a little with a sigh of content. The sight of her strong man in his helplessness affected the girl powerfully; when he moved, her heart set up a great beating, and the alarmed blood tingled to her finger-tips.

During this time but an indifferent watch was kept. Humpy Jull had fallen asleep again. There seemed little need to watch on such a voyage. True, they had passed little reefs and stretches of broken water where the swift current met obstructions inshore, but there had been no disturbance that extended out into midstream. The raft was carried down squarely in the middle of the channel.

Once when it came to Vassall's turn to be dummy, he stood up to stretch his legs and look about him. A short distance ahead he saw that the invariably earthy slope of the hills was broken by an outcropping

of rock on either side. The band of rock evidently crossed the river, for in the middle a ragged islet of rock stuck its head out of the water.

Vassall debated on which side of the rock they ought to pass with the raft. To a riverman the "middle of the stream" means the main sweep of the current of course. Vassall was not a riverman and he did not observe that the greater body of water made off to the left and around that side of the island. The channel on the right-hand side stretched straight ahead of them, wide and apparently smooth, and to Vassall this looked like the "middle of the stream." If he had left the raft alone the current of its own accord would have carried it around to the left, but he ran out a sweep and pulled her to the other side. He saw no occasion for waking Jack.

A new hand was dealt and he returned to the game. It was a critical hand, and the attention of all four of the players was closely fixed on the cards until the last trick was taken. Not until then did they become aware of the grumble of broken water ahead. They had heard the sound before on the reefs they had passed. Vassall, looking up, saw only a kind of smudge like a thumb-mark drawn across the smooth face of the river ahead. The next time he looked he saw darkish spots here and there between the island and the shore.

The noise became louder. Finally he got up, and in the act of rising the ominous white leaped into his view. It was a reef extending all the way across.

The dark spots were rocks covered by an inch or two of water.

For an instant Vassall looked at it stupidly. The others were arranging their cards in ignorance of any danger. Before Vassall could wake Jack, the hoarse roar of the reef reached the subconsciousness of the sleeping man, and he sprang up, all standing. A glance told him everything.

"What are we doing on this side?" he cried.

He ran out one sweep, and motioned Vassall to the other. They pulled with a will. The others watched, not fully understanding the nature of the danger yet, but alarmed by Jack's grimness. He was heading the raft for the main channel. They had not reached the island yet, but Jack soon saw that at the rate they were being carried down he could not make the other side, nor could he land his clumsy craft on the shore above the reef.

"Save your strength," he said to Vassall. "We'll have to chance it. Everybody sit still and hold on."

A breathless few minutes succeeded. Jack steered for the widest space he could see between the rocks. Those who were sitting down still could not see much of what was ahead, but the roar of the water was now sufficiently terrifying. Moving of a piece with the current as they were, it seemed as if they were not moving, but that the broken rocks were striding to meet them, not very fast, but inexorably. It was hard to sit and wait.

Then as they came close they saw how the water slipped silkily over the reef with the dark shadows showing like teeth beneath, and boiled up below. The women cried out sharply, and the men turned pale. It suddenly became evident how fast the heavy raft was moving.

"Throw yourselves flat and hang on!" Jack shouted.

They obeyed. There was a dreadful moment of waiting, while the roar of the water filled their ears. Then she struck. One side of the raft slid up on a submerged shelf, the floor tilted at a steep angle, and the current surged over the lower side, sweeping everything movable off. Jack stood up to his kness in the torrent, pushing desperately at the heavy sweep. He budged her inch by inch.

"Lie still!" he shouted. "For your lives! We'll make it yet!"

But panic seized upon his passengers. Somebody scrambled for the high side of the raft, and the rest followed. The strain was too great for the lashings. A rope parted somewhere, and the floor instantly heaved up beneath them. There was a brief, wild confusion of thrashing, tangled logs and feeble human bodies. Then the whole thing, logs, bodies, baggage, and playing cards was swept over into the deep, rough water below.

When Jack came to the surface he had a confused impression of bobbing heads and logs on every side. He seized the nearest log, and unstrapping

the cartridge belt and the gun that were drowning him, buckled it on. Meanwhile, he was looking for the long hair of the women. He reached one of them in six strokes. A pair of clutching arms reached for him, but he dived, and seizing her by the collar, towed her to the nearest log. It was Linda.

Leaving her supported, he trod water looking for Kate. He saw more streaming hair not far away, and reached the spot as she rose again. There was sterner stuff here; her face was white and wild, but her arms were under control. She put her hands on Jack's shoulders as he commanded, and he brought her likewise to a log. A little brown box came bobbing by, Linda's jewel-case. Kate coolly put out her hand and secured it.

All this had taken but a minute. Jack looked about him. Everything was being carried down of a piece with the current, and they were all close together. It seemed to Jack as if the whole face of the river was littered with playing cards. He had a particular impression of the deuce of clubs. Vassall was helping Baldwin Ferrie to a log, and Humpy Jull had secured the log that bore Jack's cartridge belt. Only Sir Bryson was missing. Farther out Jack saw a feeble commotion, and no log near.

"See to the women!" he called to Vassall. "There's a backwater inshore. Humpy, save that belt as you value your life!"

The struggling figure sank before he reached it.

Jack swam about the spot. It rose again, but out of his reach. He dived for it. They came together, and a pair of frantic arms closed about Jack's neck. They sank together, Jack struggling vainly. They rose, Jack got a breath, and broke the hold. The struggling ceased.

Swinging the inert figure over his back, Jack struck out for the shore. It was a desperately hard pull. They had been carried too far to obtain any advantage from the backwater. The logs he passed were of no aid to him, because the current tended to carry them into midstream. For a long time the shore seemed only to recede as he struggled toward it. More than once fear touched him and he was on the point of going down. He rested, breathing deep, and set to it again. Finally he ceased to think or to feel, but he continued to struggle automatically, and he still clung to his burden.

It was with a kind of surprise that he finally felt the stones under his feet. He staggered ashore, and putting down the limp figure he carried, flung himself on the shore utterly exhausted. How long he lay there he hardly knew. As soon as a little strength began to stir in him, with the man-of-the-wilds instinct he set to work collecting sticks to make a fire.

He had been carried nearly a mile below the reef. By and by, far up the shore he saw some wavering, uncertain little figures. He was able to count five of them, so he knew all were safe. He hailed them shrilly

after the way of the country. After his little fire sprang up, he could see that they were coming toward him slowly, the men helping the women.

They came, a distressed little company, drenching wet, silent and dazed. They moved like automatons, as if their limbs were independent of them, and they looked at each other dully, as if not with full recognition. Reaching Jack, they stood around in an uncertain way; none of them spoke. It was as if they had lost the faculty of speech also. Linda was roused by the sight of her father; with a cry, she cast herself on his body.

"He's not drowned," Jack said quickly. "Only stunned a little."

The helplessness of the others had the effect of rousing Jack to an ardour of activity that transformed him. His gnawing anger was forgotten; his black looks were flown. Their situation was well-nigh desperate, but here the opposing forces were purely physical, such as he thoroughly understood, and loved to attack. His exhaustion passed, and his eyes became bright.

"Has anybody dry matches?" he sang out.

The dazed ones looked a little amazed at his spirits. It appeared that no one's match-safe was waterproof but Jack's own.

"Spread 'em out to dry on a rock," he said. "They may work. I have seventeen good ones. That's enough at a pinch. Everybody scatter for dry wood. Keep on the move, and get your circulation going.

Humpy, you build another fire behind the willows for the ladies. Light it from this one. We can have all the fire we want, anyway. Vassall, help me here with Sir Bryson. We must take his wet things off." He glanced up at the sun. "Rest for an hour," he said; "then on the march! Red Willow Creek to-night; Fort Cheever to-morrow afternoon!"

"But how are we going to support life on the way?" stammered Baldwin Ferrie.

Jack pointed to the belt Humpy Jull had brought along. His gun and his hunting-knife hung from it. This, with Linda's jewel-case, was the sum total of what they had saved from the wreck.

"We have the cannon," Jack said with a laugh. "About forty cartridges, and the seventeen matches. We'll make out."

An hour later they started to climb the steep, high hill to the prairie. They took it very slowly on account of Sir Bryson, who was still white and shaky. But he complained no more. Jack's example had had its effect on all, and a more cheerful feeling pervaded the party. They were at least dry and warm again. The men still regarded Jack's high spirits a little askance. It did not fit their settled convictions about him; they resented it slightly while forced to admire.

"Where are we heading for?" Vassall asked.

"There's a trail down this side of the river as well as on the other," Jack said. "I've never been over it, but if we strike straight back we must hit it."

"How will we get back across the river?"

"Nothing easier," said Jack. "When we arrive opposite the fort, if it's daylight, we'll wave a shirt; if it's night, we'll build a fire, and they'll send a canoe over for us."

Once having accomplished the difficult hill it was easy enough going over the prairie. Taking his bearings from the sun, Jack led them in a line at right angles back from the river. Linda walked beside him. Vassall and Ferrie helped support Sir Bryson. Half an hour's walking brought them to a trail, as Jack had promised, and their hearts rose. It was a less well-beaten track than the main route on the north side of the river, but easy enough to follow.

Jack called a halt. "Here we are," he said. "The first good water that I know of is Red Willow Creek. I've camped on the river at the mouth of it. It will be about seven miles. Are you good for it?"

They said they were. No one dreamed of opposing Jack now. They hung on him like defenceless merchantmen on their man-o'-war convoy.

"Vassall, you lead the way from here," Jack went on. "You'll find the creek in a big coulee. We'll camp for the night in the bottom of it. If by any chance you should lose the trail before you get there, just climb to the highest place you see, and sit down and wait till I come along."

"But where are you going?" they demanded.

"To hunt for our supper," said Jack.

He issued two of the precious matches to Humpy to make a fire on arrival. "There ought to be berries in the coulee," he said. "Collect all you can."

Linda clung to him. "Can't I go with you?" she begged.

He shook his head. "The hunter must hunt alone."

"Don't be long. Be very careful. If we lost you we'd simply lie down and die."

"Easy!" he said uncomfortably.

Linda glanced at the others. "Why should I hide it now?" she said. "I'm proud of you. They know now why I chose a man like you, a real man."

Jack had the feeling that additional turns of rope were being taken around his body. He blushed and scowled together. "Linda! for heaven's sake!" he burst out. Under his breath, "Wait until I pull you out of this before you begin to talk." He turned and fled.

A word of sympathy may be dropped here for Vassall and Ferrie. It is hard to have to stand by while your rival has the opportunity to save the lives of all and sundry, including your own, just because he is in his own element and you are out of yours. And then to be publicly scorned by the girl in the case — for that is what Linda's speech amounted to. Linda had no mercy for men; that is why, if you look into it far enough, she was bound to suffer on her own account. It was much to their credit that the two men took it generously.

It was four hours before they saw Jack again. They

had reached the rendezvous some time before, and Humpy had built a fire on the shore of the creek, around which they sat in silence, trying not to look as hungry as they felt, and trying to conceal the common anxiety that gnawed at each breast: "What will we do if he doesn't come!"

But at last his hail came over the hill, and Jack himself came running and sliding down the grassy slope, covered with feathers it appeared. They sprang up with glad cries. Never did man receive a more heartfelt welcome. They were like his hungry children waiting to be fed and cheered. It is sweet to be so necessary to one's fellow-beings, but indeed it was a startling transformation. At one bound Jack had risen in their estimation from a disgraced felon to the saviour and preserver of them all. Jack felt this, and it was his revenge.

He kissed Linda — he had to — and flung his burdens down. "Prairie chicken," he said. "Sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I hated to come in until I had got one all round, and I couldn't take any chances. They're too expensive, anyway; a shell apiece and two misses. To-morrow I'll try to bring in something more substantial."

Thus they dined off roasted prairie chicken and saskatoon berries, strictly after Nature's first intention without artificial aids. And when one wanted a drink he had to scoop it out of the creek in his hand. It was remarkable how easy all this came to them, even

to a lieutenant-governor when he was hungry and thirsty.

The night was harder. Jack built a sort of lean-to, or wind-break, of poplar, with a long fire close across in front. The heat was partly reflected down by the sloping roof, and in this pleasant oven they lay in a row on heaped spruce boughs. The men arranged to take turns in keeping up the fire throughout the night. But the ground was cold, and there was not much sleep to be had. Jack sat up and told cheerful yarns of worse nights that he had managed to live through.

At sun-up he was away again. An hour's patient waiting at the edge of a berry thicket two miles up the coulee brought him what he sought, a young black bear. He brought the hams into camp. The women looked askance at his prizes, and elected to breakfast off berries alone. But baked in its hide in a pit with hot stones the meat was not to be despised, and after a few miles on the trail they were all glad to share it.

All that day Jack convoyed his little company slowly, with many a rest beside the trail. They had about twenty miles to cover. Alone, Jack would have made it in five hours, but he saw that it would be a great feat for some of the others if they got through at all that day. In spite of what he could do, in the middle of the afternoon Linda gave out, and Sir Bryson was on his last legs. The indefatigable Jack then contrived

a litter out of two poplar poles thrust through three buttoned coats, and Linda and her father took turns in riding the rest of the way.

Jack was considerably embarrassed by Sir Bryson's attitude toward him during this day. The little gentleman, as has been said, was much chastened. He was quiet; he issued no orders, nor uttered complaints, and was unaffectedly grateful for whatever was done for him. Here was a change indeed! Whenever Jack approached him his confusion became visible and acute. At the same time he often sought Jack out, and began conversations which petered out to nothing. Manifestly he had something on his mind that his tongue balked at uttering.

It came out at last. During one of the rests they were all sitting in the grass, Jack among the others, busily intent upon cleaning the precious "cannon" with a sleeve of his shirt that he had sacrificed to the purpose. Sir Bryson suddenly moved closer to him.

"Young man," he began, and his lofty tone could not hide the genuine feeling, "they tell me you saved my life yesterday. I don't remember much about it myself."

Jack looked up, alarmed and frowning. "That's all right," he said hurriedly. "Everybody did what he could."

"And Linda and Mrs. Worsley too," Sir Bryson went on. "It was very gallantly done."

"Vassall would have done it, only I was nearer," Jack said gruffly. "Please don't say anything more. It makes me feel like a fool!"

"It must be spoken of," Sir Bryson persisted. "But it's difficult — I hardly know ——"

Jack did not perceive the exact nature of the old gentleman's difficulty. He got up. "It was all in the day's work," he said awkwardly. "You don't need to feel that it changes the situation at all."

Sir Bryson rose too. All tousled, creased and bedraggled as he was, the little governor was never more truly dignified. "You do not understand me," he said. "I — I am very grateful. Moreover, I am sorry for things I said. I desire to acknowledge it here before our friends who were present when I said them."

Jack looked away in acute embarrassment. "Very handsomely said, Sir Bryson," he muttered.

This ended the incident for the present. The air was much cleared by it. However, it gave rise to something it was necessary for Jack to unburden himself of. He waited until he could get Sir Bryson away from the others.

"Sir Bryson," he said doggedly. "I wanted to tell you that I understand my being useful to you doesn't clear my name, doesn't make me any more a desirable suitor for your daughter."

Sir Bryson made a deprecating gesture.

"Under the circumstances," Jack continued, "I don't want her any more than you want me. It is

agreed between Miss Linda and I that we are to have nothing to do with each other until I succeed in clearing myself."

They shook hands on it. Later Vassall and Baldwin Ferrie took opportunity to follow in the lead of their master and ask to shake Jack's hand. For the rest of the day Jack moved in an atmosphere warm with their gratitude and admiration. It was not unpleasant in itself of course, but somehow he felt as if everything that happened tended to tighten little by little the coils in which he found himself. Mile by mile as they neared the end of the journey, and the obstacles retreated, his spirits went down. He was elevated into Sir Bryson's good graces, but not into his own. This was his ingenious difficulty: that the girl he didn't want was attached as a rider to the good name he had to have.

At the day's close he led his bedraggled and dead weary little company stumbling down the hill to the river bank opposite Fort Cheever. There, a fire built on the shore, with its mounting pillar of smoke, soon brought over Davy in a dugout to investigate. Great was the boy's astonishment at the sight of them.

Jack burned with a question that he desired to ask him, but he could not bring his tongue to form Mary's name. His heart began to beat fast as they approached the other shore. He wondered if he would see her. He hoped not, he told himself, and all the while desiring it as a desert traveller longs for water.

## XV

## AN EXPEDITION OF THREE

MARY was not in evidence around the fort. Jack spent half the night talking things over with David Cranston in the store. In the sturdy Scotch trader he found a friend according to his need. He experienced an abounding relief in unburdening himself to a man who merely smoked and nodded understandingly, without making any fuss.

"You don't have to explain to me that you're no thief," Cranston said coolly.

That was all to be said on the subject. As to the feminine element in his difficulties, Jack was necessarily silent.

"If my sons were a year or two older," Cranston said strongly. "As it is I am tied here hand and foot!"

Jack swore at him gratefully. "This is my fight," he said. "I couldn't let you give up your time to it."

"I suppose you'll take some of the men out of Sir Bryson's party back with you," said Cranston.

Jack shook his head. "Humpy Jull's all right, but he can't ride, and I have to ride like sin. Vassall's a square head too, in his way, but either one of them would only weaken me. They don't know the

people. They couldn't face them down. They couldn't walk into their tepees and tell the beggars to go to hell."

Cranston smiled grimly. "Is that what you calculate to do?"

"You know what I mean. It's a way of putting it."

Cranston considered a moment. "Take Davy," he said. "The boy has pluck. He would be wild to go."

Jack was more moved than he cared to show. "Damn decent of you, Cranston," he growled. "I won't do it," he added aloud. "It's too much of a responsibility. Jean Paul is clever enough to see that he could always get at me through the boy."

"What's the alternative then?" asked Cranston.

"I'm going it alone," said Jack doggedly.

Cranston struck the counter with his fist. "No, by Gad!" he cried. "I'm the boss around here. You know as well as I that it's foolhardy for a man to ride alone at any time — the police don't do it — let alone into a village of redskins in an ugly mood. That's tempting them to murder you. And if they did, how could we convict them?"

Jack's face hardened. "They wouldn't murder me," he said, "because I'm not afraid of them."

"That's all right. It's too big a chance."

"You'd think nothing of taking it yourself."

"Never you mind that. I'm the boss here, and I forbid it!"

"You're not my boss," muttered Jack.

"Just the same, I can prevent you, my lad," said Cranston grimly. "You'll get no outfit from me for such a purpose."

Jack shrugged, and appeared to let the matter go. Cranston might have taken warning from his tight lips, but the trader thought, as he said, that he commanded the situation.

"We'll talk to Sir Bryson in the morning," Cranston went on.

"Pshaw! Sir Bryson!" muttered Jack.

"I'll get him to send Vassall down to the Crossing in a canoe with a letter to the police. I'll send my boy Angus and an Indian along. The steamboat will be up in a few days, and they can bring back the police on her. If she leaves the Crossing before they get there, the captain will turn back for the policemen. With luck they'll all be back in a week."

"A week!" thought Jack. "What would I be doing all that time? Biting my thumbs?"

By morning Jack had made his plan. He was only prevented from putting it into instant execution by his great desire to see Mary, though he would not acknowledge to himself that that was the reason he hung about the fort all morning. He waited until after the middle of the day, thinking that Cranston would surely ask him home to dinner, but the invitation was not forthcoming. Jack did not know it, but the trader for many years past had been obliged to give up dis-

pensing hospitality at his own board. Mrs. Cranston seized on such occasions to assert her most savage and perverse self.

Meanwhile Jack showed himself assiduously in front of the trader's windows. The ladies of Sir Bryson's party did not appear all morning out of the warehouse where they were quartered, so Jack was at least spared Linda's surveillance. His pertinacity was in vain; Mary never once showed herself. By afternoon he had worked himself up to a towering, aggrieved anger. "She might at least have a word of welcome for a white man," he thought bitterly, choosing to forget her side of the case, that she had made plain to him. At last he gave up in a passion, and strode away from the fort.

Taking care that he was not observed by Cranston, Jack headed for the Indian village, which lay on the river-flat, a half mile west of the fort. Reaching it, he sought out the head man, and by degrees brought the talk around to the subject of horses. Presently a deal was in progress, and in an hour Jack found himself the owner of two fairish ponies, with a saddle for one and a pack-saddle for the other. Some of the Indians had been trading with Cranston, and by going from tepee to tepee and offering a premium on the company's prices, Jack was able to collect the grub he required, together with blankets and a Winchester and ammunition. He paid for all this with an order on Cranston, and with the order he sent back a note:

DEAR CRANSTON: I hope you won't lay this up against me. I feel as if you are the only friend I have, and I don't want to make you sore, but I've got to go. If I had to hang around the fort doing nothing for a week I'd go clean off my nut. You needn't bother your head about me. I know exactly what I'm going to do, and I'm not going to get murdered either. I'll bring you back your horses in a few days, also Garrod and Jean Paul, unless I have to bury them.

Tell Sir Bryson and his people.

Remember me to Mary.

JACK.

By nine o'clock he had ridden fifty miles, and he camped then only because his grass-fed beasts could go no farther. He turned them out, and ate, and crawled between his blankets by the fire; but not, in spite of his weariness, to sleep. He found that he had not succeded in galloping away from the ache in his breast: "Mary! Mary! Mary!" it throbbed with every beat.

Wakefulness was a novel sensation to Jack. Cursing at himself, he resolutely closed his eyes and counted sheep, but in vain. He got up and replenished his fire. He lit his pipe, and, walking up and down in the grass of the prairie, gazed up at the quiet stars for peace. If he could have inspired his horses with some of his own restlessness he would have ridden on, but the poor beasts were standing close by with hanging heads, too weary to eat.

He did fall asleep at last, of course. only to be immediately wakened, it seemed to him, by a distant thudding of hoofs on the earth. It is a significant sound

in a solitude, and, sitting up, he listened sharply. By the movement of the stars he saw that several hours had passed since he fell asleep. It could not be his own horses, because they were hobbled. In any case there were more than two approaching. They were coming from the direction of the fort. Jack, frowning, wondered if Cranston would go so far as to attempt to prevent him from carrying out his purpose. With instinctive caution he drew back from his fire and crouched in the shadow of a clump of willows.

Four horses came loping up. Jack's two came hobbling toward them out of the darkness, whinnying a welcome. The fire blazed between Jack and the newcomers, and he could not see them very well. He sensed that there were two riders, and as they slipped out of the saddles it appeared that one of them was skirted. For a moment they stood outlined against the dim light of the eastern sky, and Jack's heart began to thump against his ribs. Surely there could be but one such graceful head poised on such beautiful shoulders, but he couldn't believe it. Then they approached his fire, and he saw for sure: it was Mary and Davy.

She saw his tumbled blanket by the fire, and looked across toward where he crouched, with the firelight throwing up odd, strong shadows on her wistful face. "Jack!" she called softly. The voice knocked on his naked heart.

His hardihood failed him then. He came slowly

toward them, trembling all over, ashamed of his trembling, and horribly self-conscious. "What are you doing here?" he asked in a shaky voice.

"We are going with you," murmured Mary. Her voice, too, was suffocated as if her heart was filling her throat.

There was a little pause. Jack looked at her like an unworthy sinner, who nevertheless sees Heaven opening before him.

"Aren't you glad to see us?" demanded Davy, coming up.

Glad! Jack was quite unable to speak. Suddenly flinging an arm around the boy's shoulders he squeezed him until Davy cried out. It was meant for Mary. She saw. Dropping to the ground, she made a great business of building up the fire.

They fell to babbling foolishly without any one's caring how foolishly; they laughed for no reason, and asked the same questions over again without heeding the answers. Jack sprang to unpack and unsaddle their horses. When they were finally hobbled and turned out, he came back to Mary. She was setting out the grub-box and making tea. Davy went away to cut poles for their two little tents.

"You do wish to be friends?" Jack said pleadingly; "after what you said!"

Mary had recovered her self-possession. "I couldn't let you go alone," she parried. "That is such a foolish thing to do. I couldn't have slept

or sat still for thinking of it. Other things are not changed at all."

"But you came!" murmured Jack a little triumphantly, and moving closer to her.

She drew away. "You shouldn't say that," she murmured stiffly. "It wasn't easy for me to come. And it may cost me dear."

Jack wondered like a man why she was offended. "I know," he said, "and I'm not going to let you come. But I'm glad you wanted to."

This made matters worse. "I didn't want to," she threw back at him sharply. "I came because I was the only one who could help you. I know the Indians; they like me; they're a little afraid of me. And you can't make us go back. We have our own outfit. If you won't let us ride with you, we'll follow after!"

Jack stared, perplexed and wondering at her hurt tones. Certainly girls were beyond his comprehension. Though so different in other respects, it seemed they were alike in this: their perfect inconsistency. He tried another tack.

"Did your father let you come?"

"No," she said unwillingly. "He was very angry with you."

"He offered to let Davy come," Jack said idly.

"That's different," she said, wondering at men's stupidity.

Jack's brain moved only about a third as fast as hers. He frowned at the fire. "If you lit out without

telling him," he began, "he'll think that I — what will he think of me! After I promised."

It was Mary's turn to be surprised. "Promised what?"

Jack turned stubborn. "I can't tell you," he said.

"But something that concerns me," said Mary. "I think I have a right to know it."

Jack merely pulled in his upper lip. "You do lots of things without explaining them to me. I have the same right."

Mary dropped the inquiry. "You needn't be anxious about what father is thinking," she said coldly. "I left a letter for him, telling where we were going, and I told him you didn't know we were coming."

They were silent. Jack stared at the fire, wondering unhappily what was the matter. After they had come, and he had been so glad to see them, to be near a quarrel already! To heal this inexplicable breach he put out his hand, and took Mary's.

She snatched it away with astonishing suddenness. "Don't you dare to touch me!" she muttered, low and quivering.

He was blankly surprised. "Why, Mary! What did you come for then?"

"Not for that!" she cried, with eyes full of anger and pain. "You asked me to be friends with you. All right. Nothing else!"

"Friends shake hands, don't they?" muttered Jack sulkily. "One would think I had the leprosy!"

"You know what I mean," said Mary more quietly.

Jack scowled at the fire. "I don't see how a man and a woman — if they're young — like you and I, can be just friends."

"They can," said Mary eagerly. "I'll show you."

Jack looked at her, eager, wistful, self-forgetful as she was, and a great irresponsible longing surged up in him. Passion darkened his eyes; his breast began to heave. "I couldn't," he said hoarsely, "not with you, Mary!"

She avoided him warily. "Then I must go back," she said sadly.

Jack forgot that he had intended to send her. "No! Not now," he said sharply.

She looked at him with the extraordinary look she had for him, proud, pitying, and relentless all at once. "Listen," she commanded quietly. "Somebody has got to speak plainly. I will do it. I like you very much" — her voice faltered here — "I — I wish to be friends with you — very much. But if you are so weak and dishonourable as to make love to me when you are bound to another woman, I shall despise you, and I shall have to go!"

Jack recoiled as if she had struck him, and sat staring at her, while the two hideous words burned their way into his soul. In all his life he had never been hurt like this. She had dealt a blow at the twin gods of his idolatry: Strength and Honour. It is true he did not distinguish very clearly between physical

strength and moral. Strength, none the less, was the word that made his breast lift up, and Honour, scarcely less. Honour to Jack meant telling the truth.

The worst of the hurt was that he knew she was right. It was very true that some one had to speak plainly. This was the disconcerting thought he had been thrusting out of sight so determinedly. Now that it had been put into harsh speech it could never be ignored again.

Mary was busying herself with shaking hands among the supper things. Obviously she could scarcely see what she was doing. Davy came back with his poles.

"Go, go help him," she murmured tremulously.

Jack obeyed.

They ate as dawn began to break over the prairie, supper or breakfast, whichever it was. Davy's light-hearted chatter kept the situation from becoming acute again. There was no further suggestion of their going back. Afterward they turned in for a few hours to let the horses rest out.

Jack took refuge from the mosquitoes in Davy's tent. He could not talk, and he turned his back on the boy, but Davy, creeping close, wound an arm over Jack's shoulder, and, like an affectionate spaniel, thrust his head in Jack's neck.

"Say, I'm glad I'm here," he murmured sleepily. "Everything's all right again. I'd rather be with you than anybody, Jack. Say, I'm glad I'm a friend of

yours. You and I and Mary, we'll make a great team, eh? What a good time we 'll have!"

He fell asleep. Meanwhile Jack lay staring through the mosquito netting at the prairie grass in the ghostly light, and the low-hung, paling stars, thinking of how a woman had been obliged to remind him of Strength and Honour.

Admitting the justice of it, he took his punishment like a man. It was a much-chastened Jack that issued from the tent into the early sunshine. And although he did not know it, he was tenfold more in love with the hand that had chastised him. His glance sought hers humbly enough now. And Mary? There was none of the disdain he feared; on the contrary, her telltale eyes were lifted to his, imploring and contrite for the hurt she had dealt him.

They looked at each other, and the skies cleared. Nothing was said; nothing needed to be said. It was enough for Jack that Mary did not despise him, and it was enough for Mary that he did not hate her. They were together, and the sun was shining on a sea of green grass. Their spirits soared. Troubles and heartaches vanished like steam in the sunshine. Breakfast became a feast of laughter, and Davy was enraptured.

"Blest if I can understand you two," the boy said with an unconscious imitation of his hero's casual manner that made Mary laugh again. "One minute

you're as dumb as owls in the daytime, and the next you're laughing like a pair of loons at nothing at all."

They justified it by laughing afresh. "Oh, the loon's a much-abused bird, Mr. Davy," sang Jack. "He's not nearly as loony as his name. I think I'll adopt a loon for my crest."

"What's a crest?" Davy wanted to know.

"Oh, it's what you have on your note-paper," Jack said vaguely. "And they carve it on rings for you to seal your letters with."

Davy looked blank.

"It's a gentleman's private sign," said Mary. "His totem."

"Sure," said Jack with a surprised look. "How clever you are!"

Mary blushed to the eyes.

They packed and rode on, a cheerful trio on the trail. Jack to all appearances was his old, off-hand self, but he had stored away his lesson, and he never looked, or seemed never to look, at Mary. From her glance at him when she was unobserved one would have said she was sorry he obeyed her so well.

Mary and Davy rode with the unconscious ease of those who are born to the saddle. Mary, who had never seen a riding-habit, had contrived a divided skirt for herself, as she contrived everything for herself, cunningly. With it she wore a blue flannel shirt out of the store, that she had likewise adapted to her own figure. She had a man's felt hat, but, except when it

rained, it was hanging by its thong from her saddle-horn. Her plentiful dark hair was braided and bound close round her head. Tied to her saddle she carried a light rifle, which upon occasion she used as handily as Jack himself.

Thus she was totally without feminine aids and artifices. With that firm, straight young figure, that well-set head and those eyes, she was finer without. For all he was making believe not to look at her, she stirred Jack's deepest enthusiasm, like the sight of distant hills at evening, or a lake embowered in greenery, or anything wholly beautiful and unspoiled from the hand of Nature.

The slender Davy showed none of his sister's trimness. Davy was a little nondescript. He possessed "Sunday clothes," but he detested them, and was only truly happy in his ragged trousers, his buttonless shirt, and his blackened apologies for moccasins. Davy was apparently insensible to cold, and it was all one to him whether he was wet or dry.

At ten o'clock they rode past the little boarded-up store at Fort Geikie. Two hours later they reined in at the edge of the bench on the other side of the portage. This was the spot where they had parted so unhappily. No one referred to that now. Casting his eyes over the valley, Jack pointed to a number of dark objects in the river meadows to the west.

"The horses," said Davy.

One of the little objects reared, and moved forward in a way that was familar to them.

"And hobbled again," said Jack with a laugh.

"Of course as soon as you went away they would drive them back," said Mary. "They wouldn't want to be found with company horses in their camp."

Riding down the hill they made their noon spell on the site of Camp Trangmar. Jack opened the cache for an additional supply of grub, and what else he needed: his cherished leather chaps, his canvas lean-to, and mosquito bar.

"You won't need that," Davy said. "Sleep with me."

"For Garrod," said Jack. "We can't let the mosquitoes eat the poor devil."

Davy caught sight of the banjo inside. "Bring that," he begged.

Jack shook his head. "No time for tingle-pingling on this trip," he said, unconsciously using the trader's word.

Davy begged hard. "I'll look after it myself," he said.

Jack hesitated. His fingers itched for the strings. "Do you think we had better take it?" he asked Mary.

Mary was only human. "Why not?" she said.

One could not always be dwelling on one's troubles. The banjo was brought out, and while Mary, with veiled eyes, busied herself mixing bannock, and Davy

listened with his delighted mouth open, Jack filled his chest and gave them "Pretty Polly Oliver."

"That's great!" said Davy with a sigh of pleasure.

Mary said nothing.

"Do you like it?" Jack asked, very off-hand.

"Very pretty," she said.

"Would you dress up as a drummer-boy and follow your lover to the wars, like Polly did?" Jack asked.

"No," she said promptly.

"Why not?" he demanded, taken aback.

"She was a poor thing," said Mary scornfully. "She couldn't live single, she said. When she did get to the wars she was only in the way, and put him to the trouble of rescuing her; but it makes a pretty song of course."

"You're not very romantic," grumbled Jack.

Mary smiled to herself, and attended to the bannock. After a long time, when Jack had forgotten all about Polly, she said: "I think romances are for people who don't feel very much themselves."

After lunch, leaving Mary and Davy to finish packing, Jack circled wide over the river-meadows to round up the horses, and reconnoitre generally. Mary and Davy were to follow him. He found that two of the horses were still missing; the others were in good condition. Riding on up the trail, he dismounted at a little stream to read what was to be seen in the tracks. He saw that the horses had been driven back two days

before, and that none of them was hobbled when they crossed the stream.

At this moment all Jack's senses were suddenly roused to the *qui vive* by the sound of the hoof-beats of two horses approaching along the trail from up the valley. Here was a new factor entering the situation. Quickly mounting, he held his horse quiet under the bushes beside the trail. The newcomers trotted around a bend; all the horses whinnied, and Jack found himself face to face with Jean Paul Ascota.

## XVI

## THE TEPEES OF THE SAPIS

THE breed betrayed no surprise, and Jack reflected that he must have seen the smoke of their fire from up the valley. He was riding one of the missing horses, and the other followed with a light pack. He smiled blandly, and, bringing his horse close to Jack's, held out his hand.

"I glad you come back," he said. "I need help, me."

Jack ignored the hand. "We're not friends, Jean Paul," he said grimly, "and we won't make believe."

Jean Paul shrugged like an injured and forgiving person.

"You've got to give an account of yourself," Jack went on.

A spark shot sidewise out of Jean Paul's black eyes. "To you?" he asked.

"To me," said Jack coolly, and the blue eyes faced the black ones down.

Jean Paul thought better of his threatened defiance. "You all time think bad of me," he said deprecatingly. "I work for you. I get the horses back."

Jack laughed in his face. "You're not dealing

with Sir Bryson now. You know as well as I do that the Indians are not stealing company horses. They might be persuaded to drive them away, but they'd be glad enough to drive them back when they thought it over. The horses are nothing to me. Where's Garrod?"

Jean Paul shrugged again. "I don't know," he said. "I no can find!"

"That's a lie," said Jack. "You can find anything that you wish to find in this country."

"Maybe you tell me 'ow?" Jean Paul returned with an ill-concealed sneer.

"We'll find him, with or without you," Jack said.

The horses whinnied again, and presently Jack's little train was heard approaching along the trail.

Jean Paul started. Apparently he had supposed that Jack was alone. "Who you got?" he asked sharply.

Jack ignored the question. Jean Paul watched the bend in the trail, lynx-eyed. When Mary and Davy rode into view his angry chagrin peeped out. He immediately put on the ordinary redskin mask, but Jack had had a look beneath.

"A boy and girl!" sneered Jean Paul.

"Exactly," said Jack. "The boy and the girl speak the native talk as well as you do. They will interpret for me."

As Mary and Davy joined them, Jean Paul greeted them politely, shaking hands with each, according to custom. Mary's face was as bland and polite as

Jean Paul's own. Jack frowned to see her put her hand into the breed's, but he said nothing.

"What we do now?" asked Jean Paul of all and sundry. Thus he gracefully adopted himself into their party.

"Where is the Sapi camp?" asked Jack.

The breed pointed west. "One day," he said, "thirty mile."

"We'll sleep there to-night."

Jean Paul shrugged. "My horses tire'."

"Change 'em," said Jack. "We'll wait for you."

Jean Paul rode after the horses, and Jack sent Davy back to the cache for the half-breed's tent.

"Wouldn't it be better if we didn't let him see we were suspicious." Mary suggested.

"He'll give us the slip again, if I don't watch him."

She shook her head decisively. "Not now. He'll never let us talk to the Sapis without his being there."

Jack frowned. "My stomach rises against him! I can't hide it!"

"It would be better," she said gently.

"You're always right," he grumbled. "I'll try."

Jean Paul and Davy came back and they proceeded. Their pack-animals were but lightly laden, and they rode hard all afternoon with very little speech. Twelve miles from Camp Trangmar they came on the site of the abandoned Indian camp. At this point the Fort Erskine trail, leaving the Spirit River valley, turned northwestward to ascend beside a small tributary, the

Darwin River. This stream came down a flat and gently ascending valley, heavily timbered for the most part, and hemmed in by mountains wooded almost to their summits. It was a gloomy way, for they could see but little through the trees. Now and then from a point of vantage they had a glimpse of the magnificent bulk of Mount Darwin blocking the valley at the top.

They spelled once to eat and to rest the horses. Riding on, Mary kept asking Jean Paul how far it was. At length he said: "Two miles."

They rode a little farther, and came to a brook. "Let's us camp here," said Mary suddenly. "I'm tired."

Jack stared and frowned. Mary tired! "It's less than a mile," he began. "We have plenty of time to ride in and see this thing through before dark——" He was stopped by a look from Mary. He was learning to answer quickly to suggestions from that quarter.

"Oh, well, if you're tired," he said hastily.

When he had a chance apart with her he asked: "What's the game?"

"Don't let's be seen talking together," she said swiftly. "It's nothing much, only I think maybe he will steal away to the tepees to-night to tell them what to say to us. If he does I'll follow and listen."

Jack looked his admiration. "Good for you!" he said.

The invariable routine of camping was gone through

with, the horses unpacked and turned out, the little tents pitched, the supper cooked and eaten. Jack pitched his own little lean-to, because lying within it he could still see all that passed outside. After eating they sat around the fire for a while, and Jack sang some songs, that Jean Paul might not get the idea they were unduly on the alert. The half-breed complimented Jack on his singing.

Afterward Jack lay within his shelter, one arm over his face, while he watched from beneath it. When it became dark he saw Jean Paul issue boldly out of his tent and move around as if inviting a challenge. None being forthcoming, he went back. A moment later Jack saw a shadow issue from *behind* the little A-tent, and steal away into the bushes.

He waited a minute or two, and got up. He met Mary outside. "I'm going too," he announced.

"It will double the risk," she objected. "There's no need. Nothing can happen to me."

"You're wasting time," he said. "I'm going."

Arousing Davy, and putting him on watch, they set off on the trail. Crossing the stream, they plunged anew into the fragrant forest of old pines. It was a close, still night; the sky was heavily overcast, and it became very dark for that latitude. The trail stretched ahead like a pale ribbon vanishing into the murk at half a dozen paces. In the thicker places they had literally to feel for it with their feet. They had not very far to go. After about fifteen minutes' walking

the stillness was suddenly shattered by a chorus of barking from a few hundred yards ahead.

"That will be Jean Paul getting into camp," Mary said.

The forest ended abruptly, and they found themselves at the edge of a natural meadow reaching down to the Darwin River. Below them was a quadrangle of tepees, faintly luminous from the little fires within, as if rubbed with phosphorous. The dogs were still barking fitfully.

"Wait for me here," Mary commanded.

He unconsciously put out his hand toward her. "Mary ——"

She lingered. "Well — Jack?"

"Let me go instead. I can't stay quiet here."

"You must. You don't know their talk as well as I do. Nothing can happen to me. If they do find me out, they are my friends."

"But the dogs ——"

"They bark at nothing. No one minds them."

Her eyes beamed on him softly, like stars through the night; her soft voice was of the night too; and so brave and tender! She was adorable to him. He abruptly flung himself down in the grass to keep from seizing her in his arms.

"Go on," he said a little thickly. "Hurry back."

Hours passed, it seemed to him; it was perhaps half of one hour. The dogs barked and howled, and finally fell silent. A partridge drummed in the depths

of the forest, and an owl flew out from among the trees with a moan that rose to a shriek of agony. Down the valley a fox uttered his sharp, challenging bark, and the dogs returned with a renewed infernal clamour. A band of horses stampeded aimlessly up and down between the tepees. It was a heavy, ominous night, and every creature was uneasy.

At last quite suddenly he saw her crouching and running up the grassy slope toward him. His heart bounded with relief.

"Be quick," she whispered. "Jean Paul has started back."

They set off at a run through the black forest, with warding hands outstretched in front of them. Their flying feet gave little sound on the thick carpet of needles. In a few minutes she slowed down, and caught Jack's arm.

"All right now," she said. "He'll take his time. He suspects nothing yet."

"What did you learn?" Jack asked.

Following him in the trail, she put her hand on his shoulder to keep in touch with him in the dark. The light contact warmed Jack through and through. "Jean Paul came to Etzeeah, the head man, to tell him what to say to us to-morrow. I listened outside with my ear at the bottom of the tepee. They spoke softly. I couldn't hear everything. It seems Jean Paul's talk is always for the people to stand together and drive the white men out of their country."

"The old story," said Jack.

"He is clever and they are simple. He tells them my father cheats them, and gets their furs for nothing. He says all the redmen are ready to rise when he gives the word. He makes them think he is not a man like themselves, but a kind of spirit. They are completely under his influence. They are excited and ugly, like bad children."

"What about Garrod?"

"Nothing," she said sadly. "I think they know, but I heard nothing."

"One thing is certain," said Jack; "if we wish to get anything out of them to-morrow, we'll have to leave Jean Paul behind."

"How can we prevent him from coming with us?"

"I'll have to think about that," Jack said grimly.

Next morning Jean Paul issued out of his tent as demure and smooth-faced as a copper-coloured saint. Looking at him they were almost ready to believe that he had never left it. He did his full share of the work about camp, did it cheerfully and well. He even had the delicacy — or whatever the feeling was — to retire with his breakfast to a little distance from the others, that they might be relieved of the constraint of his company.

"He's a wonder," Jack said to Mary with a kind of admiration.

When they had finished eating, Jack spoke a word to Davy, and the two of them got a tracking line out of

the baggage, a light, strong cord that Jack had included because of the thousand uses to which it lends itself. He gave the coil to Davy to carry, and they returned to Jean Paul. Jack covertly made sure that his six-shooter was loose in its case. The half-breed, having finished eating, was sitting on the ground, lighting his pipe. Jack stood grimly waiting until he got it going well. Jean Paul flipped the match away with an air of bravado, and a sidelong sneer.

"Put your hands behind you!" Jack suddenly commanded.

Jean Paul sprang up astonished. Jack drew his gun.

"Don't move again," he harshly warned him. "Put your hands behind you."

Jean Paul slowly obeyed, and Davy twisted the cord around his wrists.

"W'at you do?" Jean Paul protested, with an eye on the gun and an admirable air of astonished innocence. "I your man, me. I all time work for you. You always moch bad to me. No believe no'ting."

"Next time you leave camp at night tell us where you're going," said Jack with a hard smile.

It did not feaze Jean Paul. "Mus' I tell w'en I go to see a girl?" he demanded, highly injured.

Jack laughed. "Very clever! But the girl was Etzeeah, and I know all you said."

Jean Paul fell suddenly silent.

"Kneel down," commanded Jack. "Tie his ankles together, Davy, with his wrists between."

Jack finished the job himself, going over all the knots, and taking half a dozen turns around Jean Paul's body, with a final knot on his chest, out of reach of both hands and teeth. He and Davy then picked him up and laid him inside his own tent. His pipe dropped out of his mouth in transit. Jack, with grim good-nature, picked it up and thrust it between his teeth again. Jean Paul puffed at it defiantly. Jack fastened the tent flaps back, affording a clear view of the interior.

"I'll have to leave him to you while we're gone, Davy. Keep away from him. Don't listen to anything he says. Above all, don't touch him. I don't see how he can work loose, but if he should" — Jack raised his voice so it would carry into the tent — "shoot him like a coyote. I order you to do it. I take the consequences."

Jean Paul lay without stirring. His face was hidden.

"God knows what poisonous mess is stewing inside his skull," Jack said to Mary, as they rode away.

When the two of them cantered into the quadrangle of the tepees, with its uproar of screaming children, yelping curs, and loose horses, it needed no second glance to confirm the report that the redskins were in an ugly temper. An angry murmur went hissing down the line like the sputtering of a fuse. Every one dropped what he was doing; heads stuck out of all the tepee openings; the little children scuttled inside.

Men scowled and fingered their guns; women laughed derisively, and spat on the ground.

Jack and Mary pulled up their horses at the top of the quadrangle, and coolly looked about them. Filth and confusion were the keynotes of the scene. This was the home-camp of this little tribe, and the offal of many seasons was disintegrating within sight. All their winter gear, furs, snowshoes and sledges, was slung from vertical poles out of harm's way. Between the tepees, on high racks out of reach of the dogs, meat was slowly curing.

As for the people, they were miserably degenerate. Their fathers, the old freebooters of the plains, would have disowned such offspring. The mark of ugliness was upon them; pinched gray cheeks and sunken chests were pitifully common; their ragged store clothes hung loosely on their meagre limbs. A consciousness of their weakness lurked in their angry eyes; in spite of themselves the quiet pose and the cold, commanding eyes of the whites struck awe into their breasts. They saw that the man and the girl had guns, but they hung in buckskin cases from the saddles, and they made no move to reach for them. They saw the two speak to each other quietly. Once they smiled.

It was upon Jack's calling Mary's attention to the absurdity of it, this little company of tatterdemalions seeking to defy the white race. There were eighteen tepees, small and large, containing perhaps ninety souls. It was absurd and it was tragic. Remote and

cut-off even from the other tribes of their own people, they had never seen any white men except the traders at Fort Cheever and Fort Erskine, and the rare travellers who passed up and down their river in the summer.

"I'm sorry for them," Mary murmured. "They don't know what they're doing."

"Don't *look* sorry for them," Jack warned. "They wouldn't understand it."

An old man issued from the largest tepee, and approached them, not without dignity. He was of good stature, but beginning to stoop. He wore a dingy capote, or overcoat made out of a blanket, and to keep his long, uncombed gray hair out of his face, he had a dirty cotton band around his forehead. Not an imposing figure, but there was a remnant of fire and pride in his old eyes.

"Etzeeah, the head man," Mary whispered to Jack.

Etzeeah concealed his feelings. Approaching Jack's horses he silently held up his hand.

Jack's eyes impaled the old man. He ignored the hand. Jack had enough of their talk for his purpose. "I do not shake hands with horse thieves," he said.

Etzeeah fell back with an angry gesture. "I am no horse thief," he said. "All the horses you see are mine, and my people's!"

"You drove away the governor's horses," said Jack. "And drove them back after he had gone. They are company horses. It was a foolish thing to do."

"It is Ascota who speaks me ill," cried Etzeeah with

a great display of anger. "He comes here, and he makes trouble. He calls us thieves and bad men. What do I know of white men, and white men's horses?"

"This is what Jean Paul told him to say," Mary murmured in English. "They were going to make believe to quarrel before us."

"Since when has the chief of the Sapis learned to lie?" demanded Jack coldly.

"I, no liar!" cried Etzeeah, taken aback.

"You told a different tale when Ascota came to your lodge last night."

Etzeeah was silenced. His jaw dropped, and his black eyes looked old and furtive.

"I have come for the sick white man, Garrod," said Jack. "Where is he?"

"I have seen no sick white man," muttered Etzeeah. "Ascota ask me already."

"Your women hear you lie," said Jack scornfully. "They are laughing behind you. I have had enough lies. Call everybody out of the tepees!"

Etzeeah stood motionless and scowling.

"Call them out!" repeated Jack, "or I will pull them out by the hair."

Etzeeah raised his voice in sullen command, and the rest of the women and the children issued out of the tepees, the little children scurrying madly to hide behind their mothers, and clinging to their skirts.

Jack pointed to the bottom of the square. "All stand close together!" he ordered.

The men scowled and muttered, but obeyed. There was no reason why any one of them should not have put a bullet through Jack's breast, sitting on his horse before them empty-handed — no reason, that is, except the terrible blue eyes, travelling among them like scorching fires. Many a little man's soul was sick with rage, and his fingers itching for the trigger, but before he could raise his gun the eyes would fall on him, withering his breast. It was the white man's scorn that emasculated them. How could one fire at a being who held himself so high?

"Go through the tepees as quickly as you can," Jack said to Mary. "I will hold your horse and watch them."

Dismounting, she made her way to Etzeeah's lodge.

A hundred pairs of black eyes watched their every movement. Etzeeah made to edge back toward the crowd.

"Stand where you are!" Jack commanded. "I am not through with you."

Etzeeah lowered his eyes, and stood still.

"Etzeeah, you are a fool," said Jack, loud enough for all to hear. "Ascota feeds you lies, and you swallow them without chewing. Do you think you can fight all the white men with your eighteen lodges? To the south there are more white men than cranes in the flocks that fly overhead in the spring. When your

few shells are spent, where will you get more bullets to shoot the white men?"

"Ascota will give us plenty shells!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"Why isn't Ascota here now to help you?" asked Jack quickly. "He said he would be here to show you how to fool me? Why? Because I tied him like a dog in his tent, with a boy to watch him."

They looked at each other and murmured.

"If you did drive the white men away," Jack went on, "how would you kill the moose for food without their powder? Who would buy your furs? Where would you get flour and tea and tobacco, and matches to light your fires? Wah! You are like children who throw their food down and tread on it, and cry for it again!"

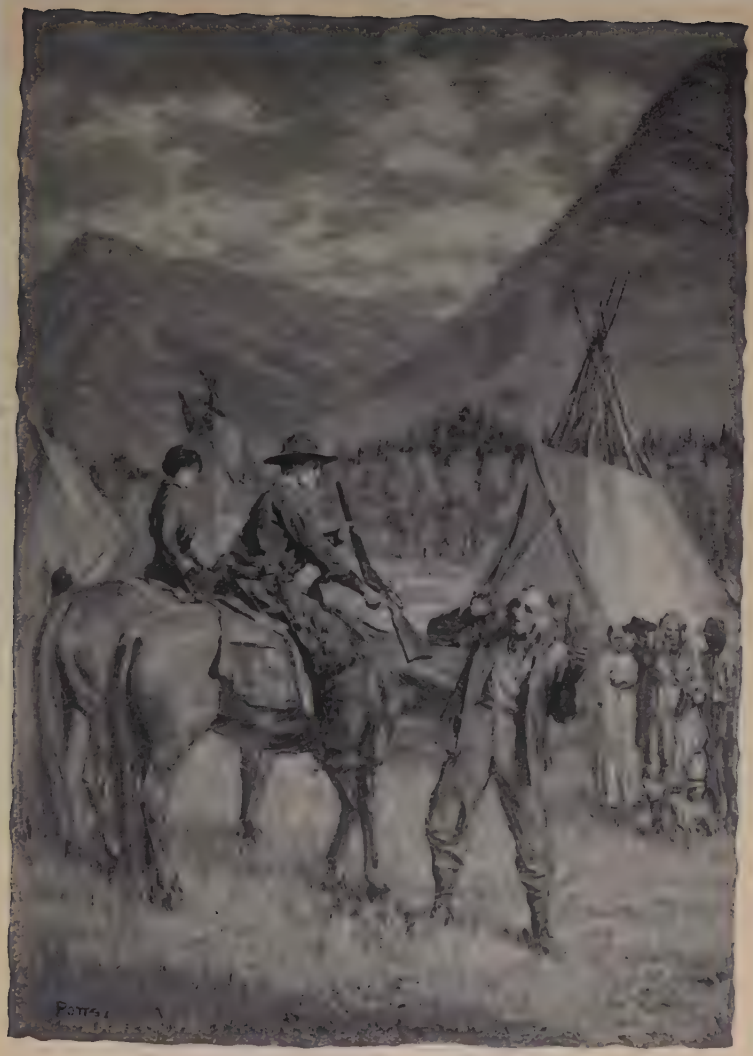
What effect this had, if any, could not be read in the dark, walled faces that fronted him.

Mary returned to Jack, bringing a gun, which she handed him without comment. He recognized it. It was a weapon that had lately been aimed at him.

"This is the sick man's gun," he said, looking hard at Etzeeah.

The chief threw up his hands. "A Winchester thirty-thirty, like all our guns," he protested. "There are twenty here the same."

Other men held up their weapons to show. Jack merely turned the gun around, and pointed to initials neatly scratched on the stock.



"F. G.," he said grimly, "Francis Garrod"

"F. G.," he said grimly; "Francis Garrod."

"How do I know?" said Etzeeah excitedly. "I have no letters. If it is the white man's gun, Ascota left it."

"Ascota does not leave a gun," said Jack. "Where is Garrod?"

"I don't know," muttered Etzeeah. "I have not seen him."

"You are lying," Jack said coldly. "For the last time I ask you, where is Garrod?"

Etzeeah fell back on a sullen, walled silence.

Jack turned to Mary. "Is there a woman or a child that he sets great store by?" he asked swiftly in English.

"Etzoogah, his son, the pretty boy yonder," she answered.

Following her glance, Jack had no difficulty in picking out the one she meant. He was a handsome, slender boy, a year or so younger than Davy. Where the other children were in rags, he was wearing an expensive wide-brimmed hat from the store, a clean blue gingham shirt, new trousers, and around his waist a gay red sash. Moreover, he had the wilful, petulant look of the spoiled child; plainly the apple of the old man's eye.

"Get me a horse and a rope bridle," Jack whispered to Mary.

There were several horses picketed within the square, handy to their owners' uses, and Mary made for the nearest.

"You take my horse?" Etzeeah demanded, scowling.

"It is for your son to ride," Jack said with a grim smile. "Etzoogah, come here!" he commanded.

The boy approached with an awed, scared air. Etzeeah started to his side, but Jack coolly separated them by moving his horse between. Mary returned with the other horse, and the boy fell into her hands. She smiled at him reassuringly.

"Get on," she said. "Nobody's going to hurt you. Come with us to our camp. Davy is there."

All the children knew Mary and Davy. Moreover, there were always good things to eat in a white man's camp. The boy was well pleased to obey. Etzeeah shrilly commanded him to dismount, but the apple of his eye merely laughed at him. The old man began to break. His eyes dulled with anxiety; his hands trembled.

"What you do with my boy?" he demanded. "We shoot if you take him."

Jack laughed. "A red man can't shoot a white man," he said. "His hand shakes too much. We will take the boy to our camp. We will keep him until you bring the sick white man to us. If you don't bring him back, well, maybe we will send the boy outside and make a white man of him."

Jack gave him a moment. There was no sign from Etzeeah, except his trembling.

"Ride on," Jack said to Mary.

They wheeled their horses, and Etzeeah broke down.

His hand went to his throat. "Stop!" he muttered thickly. He did not cry out or protest. He merely shrugged. "So be it," he said stoically. "I will find Garrod if I can. Ascota took him away from camp two days ago, and came back without him."

"Killed him?" cried Jack.

Etzeeah shook his head. "He was mad. Madmen are not harmed. He took him into the bush and left him."

"Left him to starve?" cried Jack. "Good God!"

"He was mad," repeated Etzeeah. "The beasts and the birds will bring him food."

Jack shrugged impatiently. "Very well," he said. "I'll have no more lies. You come back and show me the place now, or I take the boy."

"I come," he said. "Etzoogah, get down. Get my blanket!"

The boy obeyed, none too willingly, and Etzeeah mounted in his place. "You feed me?" he asked.

"There is plenty," said Jack. To Mary he said in English. "Make him ride ahead of you out of camp. I'll stay and hold the crowd. Sing out when you reach the trees, and I'll come."

In spite of herself, fear for him transfixed her eyes. "Jack," she murmured.

He frowned. "No weakness. You must do as I say."

Etzeeah got his blanket, and he and Mary rode out of the square. The Indians stirred and muttered

angrily, but the blue eyes still held them chained. When Mary's "All right!" reached his ears, Jack turned his horse, and, swinging himself sidewise with a thigh over the saddle, walked out of the square, watching them still. The theatrical instinct of a young man suggested rolling a cigarette to him. Slipping his arm through the bridle rein, he got out the bag of tobacco and the papers.

At a hundred yards distance the spell that held the Indians began to break, and they moved forward between the tepees, cursing Jack, and brandishing their arms. Jack's horse started forward; pulling him in, he moistened the cigarette, watching them still. Guns were raised at last — and fired. Still Jack walked his horse. He could see that as yet the gun-play was merely to save themselves in the eyes of their women. No bullets came in his direction. But he could not tell how long—— He lit his cigarette.

A bullet whined overhead. Another ploughed up a little cascade of earth alongside, and his horse sheered off. A chorus of maniacal yells was raised behind him. It was only fifteen yards to the trees. Jack threw away the cigarette, and gave the horse his head. They gained the forest, with the bullets thudding deep into the trunks on either side.

## XVII

## ASCOTA ESCAPES.

WHEN Etzeeah caught sight of the little tents through the trees, he pulled up his horse. Extending a trembling forefinger, he asked hoarsely:

"Ascota, is he there?"

"Yes," said Jack. "He can't hurt you. He's tied up."

Etzeeah slipped from his horse. "I wait here," he said. "I not go where he is."

"Are you afraid?" asked Jack with curling lip.

Etzeeah had turned pale; his eyes darted from side to side, and he moistened his lips. "I am afraid," he muttered doggedly. "He is more than a man. He has made the beasts speak to me; the porcupine, the bear, the beaver, each after his own nature. He has made men mad before my eyes, and brought their senses back when it pleased him. He mastered the white man, and made him kneel before him, and bring him his food. This I saw. The like was never known before. Who would not be afraid? What if he is tied? He will wither me with his eyes!"

Jack and Mary looked at each other in perplexity.

"Blindfold Jean Paul," Mary suggested.

"Good," said Jack with clearing brow. "Watch him," he added in English, "and come over when I wave my hand."

Jack led his horse across the brook. Here another evidence of Jean Paul Ascota's evil power awaited him. Davy at sight of Jack sprang up with an odd, low cry, and came running to meet him, running waveringly as if his knees were sinking under him. He cast himself on Jack, trembling like aspen leaves.

"Oh, Jack!" he gasped. "I'm glad — oh, Jack! Jean Paul ——"

"He's safe?" demanded Jack.

"He's safe. Oh, Jack! —he said — he's a devil, Jack. He made me want to let him go! He said — oh! it's horrible! He said — oh! I can't tell you! Jack! ——"

The boy's agonized voice trailed off; he sighed, and, his slender frame relaxing, hung limply over Jack's arm. Jack let his horse go, and waving to Mary to keep back, he bent, and dashed the cold brook water in Davy's face.

He revived in a moment or two, and clung to Jack. "Oh, Jack!" he murmured, "I thought you'd never come! I was near crazy. He said — oh! I can't tell you!"

"Never you mind, old boy," said Jack gruffly. "Forget it! Mary and I are both here. It's all right now."

He carried him up the bank, and put him down by the fire. A sip from Jack's flask further restored him. Then Jack turned with grim eyes and clenched fists toward Jean Paul's tent.

"You devil!" he muttered. It was the word they all used.

"I want to smoke," Jean Paul said impudently.

"Lie there and want it, damn you!" said Jack. He had much ado to restrain himself from kicking the beast. As it was he flung him over none too tenderly, and taking the handkerchief from the breed's neck, tied it tight round his eyes.

"There's somet'ing you don't want me to see, huh?" sneered Jean Paul.

Jack was a little staggered by his perspicacity.

He waved his hand to Mary. She brought Etzeeah across, and flew to comfort and restore Davy. They never did learn exactly what Jean Paul had said to him. At any mention of the subject the boy's agitation became painful to see.

Etzeeah after coming into camp never once opened his mouth. He regarded Jean Paul's tent as nervously as if its flimsy walls confined a man-eating grizzly. He sat down at some distance, and at the side of the tent where Jean Paul could not have seen him even had his eyes not been blindfolded.

Jack brought wood, and Mary started to prepare a meal for them all, before taking to the trail again. At a moment when there was comparative silence a

loud voice suddenly issued from the tent, speaking the Sapi tongue.

"Etzeeah is there!"

They all started violently. It was uncanny. Etzeeah paled, and sprang up. Jack laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"I smell him!" the voice of Jean Paul went on, full of mocking triumph. "Nothing can be hidden from me! Etzeeah has betrayed me! Bound and helpless though I am, don't think you can escape me, old Etzeeah! My medicine travels far! Your son, your fine boy Etzoogah, shall pay. He's paying now! He falls and twists on the ground with the frothing sickness — the fine boy! He curses his father!"

Jack was struggling with the frantic father. "For God's sake, stop his mouth!" he cried to Mary. "A gag!"

She flew to the tent, and presently the voice was stilled. The last sound it uttered was a laugh, a studied, slow, devilish laugh, frightful to untutored ears. We are accustomed to such tricks on our stage.

Etzeeah lay moaning and wailing, clawing up handfuls of earth to put on his matted gray head. Jack arose from him white and grim, and with a new light in his eyes.

"We've had about enough of this," he muttered between his teeth.

Mary, divining what was in his mind, flew to him.

"Jack! Not that! Not that!" she gasped, breathless with horror.

"I'm not going to do it here," Jack said harshly. "I'll take him away. What else can I do? Look at Davy! Look at the Indian! This breed is like a pestilence among us! He'll have us all stark mad if I don't ——"

"No! No!" she implored, clinging to him. "You and I are strong enough to stand it, Jack. We'll come through all right. But we never could forget" — her voice sunk low — "not his *blood*, Jack!"

His purpose failed him. He caught up her hand and pressed it hard to his cheek with an abrupt, odd motion. Dropping it, he turned away. "All right," he said shortly. His eyes fell on Etzeeah. "Get up!" he cried scornfully. "This is old woman's talk! If he can send sickness through the air, why doesn't he strike *me* down, who bound him, and blinded, and gagged him?"

Etzeeah, struck by the reasonableness of this, ceased his frantic lamentations.

In an hour they were ready for the trail again. Jack sent Mary and Davy on ahead with Etzeeah and the pack-horses. It was arranged that as soon as they reached the site of the former Indian camp, where Etzeeah said Jean Paul had turned Garrod adrift, they were to drop the baggage and go in search of the missing man.

As soon as the others had ridden out of sight, Jack

removed the blind and the gag from Jean Paul and cut the cord that bound his ankles and his wrists together. He freed his wrists; his ankles he left bound. The half-breed stretched out, and rolled on the ground in an ecstacy of relief. Finally he sat up, and Jack put the food that had been left for him where he could reach it. Jack stood back, watching him grimly, a hand on the butt of his revolver.

"Are you goin' to shoot me?" Jean Paul demanded coolly.

"I wouldn't waste good food on you if I were," returned Jack. "Hurry up and put it away."

"You not got the nerve to shoot me," sneered Jean Paul.

"Try to hypnotize me and you'll see," Jack said with a hard smile. "I'd be glad of an excuse."

"Why don' you shoot me now?" Jean Paul persisted, with a look like a vain and wilful child, experimenting to see how far he can go against a stronger force.

"I'd rather see you hang," said Jack.

"The police can't touch me. I do not'ing against the law, me."

"There's a thing called treason in this country," said Jack. "You can hang for that."

Jean Paul laughed. "Fort Cheever long way," he said. "You not bring me there, never."

"Then I'll bury you on the way," said Jack with his grim start of laughter.

When Jean Paul had eaten, Jack bound his hands in front of him this time, and liberated his feet.

"Get on," he said, pointing to the horse.

"You can't make me," Jean Paul said with his sidelong look.

"Shan't try," said Jack coolly. "You can run along at my horse's tail if you'd rather."

Jean Paul scowled at the suggested indignity, and climbed on without more ado. Jack tied his hands to the saddle horn.

It was seventeen miles down the forested valley back to the site of the former Indian camp. This, the ancient route between Forts Cheever and Erskine, was a good trail, and they covered the distance without stopping. Jean Paul rode ahead, Jack following with his revolver loose in its holster. It may be said that he almost hoped the breed would try to escape, to give him a chance to use it, but perhaps Jean Paul guessed what was in his mind. At any rate he rode quietly.

Issuing out of the forest at last, the Spirit River valley was spread before them, with the big stream winding among its wide, naked bars. The abandoned camp lay below them, a village of bare tepee poles in a rich meadow surrounded by an open park of white-stemmed poplars. As they approached it a fresh anxiety struck at Jack's breast, for he saw the three pack-horses picketed to the trees with their packs on their backs. He knew that only an emergency

would have taken Mary and Davy away without unloading them. The animals had been rolling, to the no small detriment of their baggage. Jean Paul laughed at the sight.

Jack had no recourse but to possess his soul in patience until they came back. Meanwhile he unpacked the horses, and pitched their four little tents, two on each side of the fire. He bound Jean Paul securely as before, and put him in his own tent. He hung the gag from the ridge-pole with significant action. Jean Paul's lips were already bruised and blue as a result of the previous application.

Not until late afternoon was Jack's anxious breast relieved by the sight of the three horses single-footing it across the meadow. Davy rode first, then Etzeeah, looking crestfallen and sullen, and Mary bringing up the rear, her rifle across her arm, and determination making her girl's face grim. Evidently there had been trouble; but the three of them, and uninjured! Jack could have shouted with relief.

"He ran away," Mary explained briefly. "Davy and I had hobbled two of the riding horses, when he suddenly jumped on the third and headed north. He got a couple of minutes' start before we could get the hobbles off and after him. When he got in the timber, he turned the horse adrift, and we lost more time following its tracks. But I guessed he would make back to the trail as soon as you had passed, so we patrolled it, and we nabbed him at last."

"Good work!" said Jack briefly. It did not occur to him that there was something rather extraordinary in a mere girl and boy bringing in the headman of the Sapi Indians by themselves. He expected it of their white blood.

There seemed to be nothing for it now but to bind Etzeeah hand and foot also, and to convert Jack's tent into a cell for him. The two prisoners lay in their separate shelters on one side of the fire, while their captors watched them from the other. Jack was to sleep with Davy, and except for Mary's rifle, all the weapons in camp were stowed in that tent. The long-threatened rain set in steady and cold, and the night threatened to be as dark as winter.

They ate their supper inside Davy's tent, while the fire sputtered and sulked in the rain. A heavy silence prevailed; for one thing, they were dead weary, and their difficulties were pressing thick upon them. The rain did not lighten them. Jack, looking at Mary and Davy, thought with softening eyes:

"They're clear grit! But if I only had another man!"

The instant they had finished eating he ordered the two youngsters to bed. "I'll feed the two of them," he said, nodding across the fire, "and clean up. It will help keep me awake."

"You need sleep more than either of us," Mary objected.

"If I once let myself go I'd never wake," he said with a laugh. "I'll call you at midnight." It was

tacitly understood between them that Davy was not to keep watch.

His work done, Jack sat down inside the door of Davy's tent to smoke, and if he could, to keep the fire going in spite of the rain. He found that it required too great a blaze to be proof against the downpour. He had not nearly enough wood to last throughout the night, so he let it out in order that Mary might enjoy what remained of the fuel. When the fire went out he could no longer see into Jean Paul's tent, so he crossed over and sat down beside him. Throughout the weary hours he sat smoking to keep himself awake, until his mouth was raw. From the adjoining tent issued the reassuring sound of Etzeeah's snores; Jean Paul, too, never stirred, and his breathing was deep and slow.

Midnight had passed before Jack had the heart to waken Mary. He first took advantage of a lull in the rain to start the fire again. As he threw back the curtain of her little tent, the firelight shone in her face, rosy and serene in sleep, her cheek pillowed on her round arm. The sight stirred him to the very core of his being. He knelt, gazing at her breathlessly. He forgot everything, except that she was lovely. He suddenly bent over her with a guilty air, and lightly kissed her lips.

She opened her eyes. He sprang away in a panic at the thought of her scorn. But she awoke with an enchanting smile. "Jack I dreamed ——" she began,

as if it were the sweetest and the most natural thing in the world for her to find him bending over her at night — and caught herself up with a burning blush. Jack hastily retreated outside. Neither of them referred to it again.

Jack was asleep as soon as he stretched himself beside Davy. The next thing he knew, something had happened, what it was he could not tell. He staggered to his feet, and out into the open, drunken, paralyzed with sleep, and fighting for consciousness.

"Jack, he's gone!" cried Mary.

That awakened him. He saw her on her knees before Jean Paul's tent, and ran to her. The tent was empty. The rain poured down on their heads unheeded. The fire was out.

Mary was in great distress. "My fault," she said. "It rained harder than ever, and the fire went out. I could not bear to sit beside him as you did. It made me sick to be so near him! I thought I could watch from my tent. The wind came up and it was hard to see. He fixed the blanket to look as if he was still under it. He must have slipped out of the back!"

"But tied hand and foot!" cried Jack.

"The cords are here," she said, displaying them.

"But how?" demanded Jack.

Mary's searching hand found two small stones in the blanket that she showed Jack; one had a sharp, jagged edge, and the explanation was clear. Throughout the hours when Jack sat beside him, and he seemed

to be so sound asleep, the wily breed had been patiently rubbing at the cords until they frayed apart.

"No more your fault than mine," said Jack grimly.

Simultaneously the thought of Etzeeah occurred to them, and they sprang to look under the adjoining shelter. At first glance in the darkness, the Indian seemed to be safely there, but when Jack put out his hand the puffed-up blanket collapsed, and there was nothing under it. At that, for the first, their strong young breasts were shaken by awe.

"Good God!" Jack gasped. "He's got him, too! How could he? With you not twenty feet away. And not a sound. Is it a man or a devil?"

The pegs that held down the back of Jack's lean-to were drawn, showing how Jean Paul had entered, and how he had removed his prey.

"Etzeeah ——" said Mary tremblingly, "do you suppose Jean Paul has ——"

"He would hardly take him alive," said Jack grimly, "without a sound."

"But he had no weapon, we know that."

"His hands!"

They were silent.

"But if he did," faltered Mary, "why would he take — take the body away?"

Jack shook his head. "They are always mysterious," he said.

"He may be near," whispered Mary. "What's to be done?"

"He's not dangerous to us until he gets a weapon," said Jack. "Wake Davy, and you two watch our guns. I'll bring in the horses."

It was near four, and beginning to be light. The rain ceased, and a thick white mist clung to the river-meadows. It was not easy to find the horses. Jack satisfied himself that two of them were missing. Why two? he thought. He did not find the body of Etzeeah, as he half expected.

He had to wait for better light before he could look for tracks. He found them at last, leading back up the Darwin valley, the fresh hoof-prints of two horses superimposed on the confusion of tracks they had made coming and going. The horses had been ridden at a gallop. Jack returned to tell Mary.

"He's gone all right," he said. "And alive or dead, he's taken Etzeeah with him. The second horse carried a load too. He's gone back to the Sapis for grub and a gun."

Mary searched Jack's face with a poignant anxiety to see what he intended to do. "Let him go," she suggested. "We know that Garrod is near here somewhere.'

Jack stood considering with bent brows and clenched hands. He finally shook his head. "He could come back to-night, and pick us off one by one around our fire. We'll have no peace or security until I get him, Mary. I'll have to leave Garrod to you and Davy. You know how much finding him means to me!"

"But you," she faltered, her eyes wide with terror for him, "you can't go back alone to the Sapis. They shot at you!"

Jack's uncertainty was gone. He raised a face, transfigured.

"Pshaw! That mongrel crew!" he cried. "They're the least of my difficulties. I'll drop on them before Jean Paul can work them up to mischief. *I've got to get that breed!* No murder can be done in my camp, and the murderer get away! No redskin shall ever live to brag of how he bested me! I'll get him if I have to ride to hell and drag him out!"

## XVIII

## THE END OF ASCOTA

TWO hours later Jack rode into the Sapi village for the second time, and flung himself off his tired and dripping mount. The horse stood with hanging head, and feet planted wide apart, fighting for breath. This time Jack's arrival created little visible sensation. The people were otherwise and terribly preoccupied. A strange silence prevailed, extending even to the children and the dogs. Many of the people were gathered around the entrance to Etzeeah's lodge. They merely turned their heads with a scowl, and the men drew on the walled look they affect in the presence of whites. In the faces of the women and children awe and terror were painted.

"Ascota, where is he?" Jack demanded.

Hands were silently pointed up the valley.

"How long?"

"Half an hour," one said.

Outside the square Jack saw two more dead weary horses still wet from their punishing ride.

"Where is Etzeeah?" he asked.

There was no answer. All the heads turned as one toward the tepee.

Jack threw back the blind that hangs over the entrance, and, stooping, entered. He was prepared for what he saw. The body of the old man sprawled on its back beside the fire. All around the tepee squatted his wives and his sons in attitudes of sullen mourning. Etzoogah, the best-beloved, eyed the body askance with scared eyes, and chewed the tassel of his red sash. Etzeeah was not a comely sight. Death was in his face, but none of the majesty of death. His grimy, wrinkled skin was livid and blackened. The marks on his scrawny throat showed how he had met his end.

Stooping, Jack picked up his hand, and let it fall. It was significantly cold and stiff. He decently composed the dead man's limbs, and signed to one of the women to cover the body with her shawl.

Rising, he looked grimly around the circle. "This is murder!" he said.

None showed in any way that they heard.

"Who will ride with me to catch the murderer?" he demanded.

None moved. The faces of the women showed a start of terror.

Jack went outside again, and looked over the silent crowd. Seeing Charlbogin, one of the deserters, among them, he went to him.

"Did Ascota speak?" he demanded.

The sulky boy could not resist the command. "Ascota throw Etzeeah on the ground, so!" he said.

with a striking gesture. "He say: 'This is a man who betrayed me! Bury him!'"

A shudder passed through the crowd. Children wailed and whimpered.

"Then what?" asked Jack.

"He take a gun and a blanket, and moose meat from the fire; he catch a horse and ride west."

"And you let him go!" exclaimed Jack.

"Ascota is not a man like us," the young man muttered. "He does what he likes."

"More woman's talk!" cried Jack. "Are there any men among you? Come with me, and I'll show you stronger magic than Ascota's."

Some of the men affected to smile contemptuously as at an idle boaster. None moved to follow him. The obstinacy of their terror faced Jack like a wall, and he saw the futility of trying to move it.

He cursed them roundly. "I'll go alone then," he cried. "Bring me the best horse there is. I'll pay."

They shrugged as much as to say: "Let him, as long as he pays." One went to get the horse. In five minutes Jack was pounding the trail again.

Beyond the village the valley narrowed, and the roar of the plunging stream rose from the bottom of it. The bordering hills rapidly became steeper and higher. The trail did not follow the course of the river, but found an easier route along the face of the hills a hundred feet or so above. The sides of the hills had been burned over here, and the forest was only a

wilderness of naked, charred sticks. Many of these had fallen in the trail, making slow going for the horse. Occasionally the little river paused for a while in its headlong descent to wander back and forth through a green meadow. The trail came down to cross these easy places, and it was only here that Jack could extend his horse.

The plain tracks of Jean Paul's horse led him on. Jack could read that the breed was riding recklessly and distancing him steadily mile by mile, but he would not on that account risk his own horse's legs through the down timber. "I'll get him," he said to himself coolly, with the terrible singleness of purpose of which he was capable. In such a mood he was no longer a man, but an engine

Jack had come across the mountains from Fort Erskine by this trail, and he knew it well. It was evidently for Fort Erskine, where he was not well known, that Jean Paul was making. Ahead, through the forest of bare sticks that hemmed him in, Jack could see the gateway to the mountains, the magnificent limestone pile of Mount Darwin on the right. He had worked around the base of Darwin, and all this was familiar ground.

It was about noon when Jack and his horse, rounding a spur of the hill, were brought up all standing by the sight of a dark body lying in the trail ahead. Dismounting, and tying his trembling animal to a tree, Jack went forward to investigate. It was a horse, Jean

Paul's horse, with a broken foreleg, and abandoned to its fate. Jack's heart beat high with hope; the end of this thing was in sight now. The poor brute raised agonized eyes to him. Jack could not put a bullet through its head without betraying his whereabouts, but he mercifully cut its throat.

He proceeded warily. He was covered from above by the very steepness of the hill and the impenetrable barriers of the fallen timber. The prints of Jean Paul's moccasins led him ahead. The trail dropped steeply to a little stream that he knew well; it drained the easterly slope of Mount Darwin. It marked the edge of the burned-over tract, and on the other side the trail plunged into virgin forest again.

Jack went forward as cautiously as an Indian, taking advantage of every scrap of cover. At the brook he lost Jean Paul's tracks. It was clear the breed had waded either up or down. Jack was pretty sure he would not be far away, for the redskin of Jean Paul's type has no love for long journeys afoot. But it promised to be a somewhat extended stalk and his horse was no use to him. He therefore went back, cached his saddle, and turned the beast out hobbled, trusting that it would find its way back to the last river-meadow they had passed. Blanket and grub Jack strapped on his back, and his gun he carried under his arm.

He spent an hour searching up and down the shores of the creek for tracks, without success. Neither was there any evidence of Jean Paul's having returned

to the trail farther along. If Jack was well skilled in reading tracks, the breed was adept in hiding them. Jack's only recourse was to climb. There is a little eminence abutting on the base of Mount Darwin and on the top of it a knoll of naked rock that overlooks the valley for miles up and down. Knowing the natives' deep-rooted aversion to drinking cold water, Jack guessed that Jean Paul would have to build a fire, and from this point of vantage a fire, however small, would almost surely betray his whereabouts.

Taking his bearings, he made a beeline up the steep slope through the heavy, old timber that reached up from the valley, and through a dense light growth of poplar above. This part of the mountain offered no special difficulties in climbing, and in half an hour he threw himself down on the flat top of the knoll, with the valley spread before him.

Mount Darwin reaches a long promontory down the valley it has given its name to. The promontory consists of seven little peaks in a row, each one rising over the head of the one in front, and the seventh is the actual summit of the mountain. It was on number one of these little summits that Jack now lay, looking down the valley up which he had ridden that morning. A mile or so away was a patch of green with a black dot upon it, that he guessed was his horse.

Off to his left, hidden in the forest, the creek came tumbling down from the snows above; on his right hand the river washed the rocky base of the monarch. The

easiest way to the summit is right on up over the succeeding peaks; indeed on this side there is a mountain goat trail direct to the top. Darwin can also be climbed, but not so easily, by ascending the creek for a couple of miles, thence up a steep slide to a long hogback that leads back to the sixth peak. On the river side the rocky cliffs tower six thousand feet into the air, sheer and unscalable. Such was the theatre of the pursuit of Jean Paul Ascota.

In all the wide space opened to Jack's eye there was not a sign of life, except the black pin-point that he supposed was his horse, and a pair of eagles, sailing and screaming high above the forest. Nowhere in the brilliantly clear air was there the least sign of smoke. He ate some of his bread and meat while he watched, and smoked his pipe. He marked a place around to the right below where the trail passed over a rocky spur. On the other side it was open to him through the down timber; so that Jean Paul could not pass either way on the trail without his seeing him.

It was hard on the engine of retribution to be obliged to sit and wait. When his pipe went out he moved restlessly up and down his little plateau or shelf of rock. Behind him, the forest grew close and high, hiding the rest of the mountain. He never knew quite how it happened, but at one end of the rock, near the place where he had come up, he suddenly found himself staring at the perfect print of a moccasined foot in a patch of moss! His breast swelled with satis-

faction at the sight; at the same time he frowned with chagrin to think of the valuable time he had wasted sitting within twenty feet of Jean Paul's trail

Jean Paul's path up through the thickly springing poplar saplings was not more than two yards from Jack's own. Such are the caprices of the Goddess of Chance! He had crossed the rock, and continued on up the mountain by the mountain goat trail, which first became visible here. Evidently believing that he had shaken off pursuit, and that no one would dream of looking for him on the mountain, he was no longer taking any care to cover his tracks

Jack hastened after, as keen and determined as a high-bred hound whom nothing short of a cataclysm could divert from his purpose. The rough track followed the top of a stony ridge, which dropped steeply to the river on one side, and sloped more gradually into a forested hollow on the other. A thick growth of pines afforded him perfect cover. Like all animal paths, the trail wound like a tangled string among the trees. The growth ended abruptly on the edge of a shallow rocky cut athwart the ridge. On the other side of the cut rose the steep face of the second little peak in the series.

Jack paused within the shelter of the trees to reconnoitre. The great slope of rock opposite, with its wide, bare ditch, made a well-nigh perfect natural fortification. He watched the top of it lynx-eyed, and presently he was rewarded by the sight of a wisp of

smoke floating over the edge. Jack drew a long breath and grimly smiled. So that was where he was!

He had chosen admirably. The growing timber ended at the spot where Jack was, but up above there was enough down timber to keep the breed in fire until the judgment day, if he wished to stay, and his fire would be invisible from any point in the valley. For water, all the ledges and hollows on the northerly side were heaped with snow; for food there were mountain goats and ptarmigan; for defence he had only to roll a stone down on the head of any one who tried to climb to his aerie.

While Jack watched, carefully concealed, Jean Paul suddenly showed himself boldly on the edge of the cliff. The distance was about three hundred yards, a possible shot, but at a difficult angle. Jack held his hand. It was all important not to put the half-breed on his guard just yet. Jean Paul carelessly surveyed the approaches to his position, and went back out of sight.

Any attack from in front was out of the question. Only one thing suggested itself to Jack: to climb the mountain by the other possible route, and come down on Jean Paul from above. As soon as it occurred to him he started to retrace his steps, without giving a thought to the enormous physical exertion involved. This way was beset with difficulties; the bed of the creek was heaped with the tangled trunks brought down by the freshets. But Jack set his teeth doggedly, and attack-

ing these obstacles, put them behind him one after another.

The sun was three hours lower before he stood at the edge of the timber line on the other great spur of the mountain. He hesitated here. Above him extended a smooth, steep slide of earth and stones at least two thousand feet across, and without so much as a bush or a boulder for cover. At the top of this slide was the hogback that led back to the sixth peak. If Jean Paul was watchful he could scarcely fail to see Jack mounting the naked slope. True, nearly half a mile separated them, but a moving black spot, however small, would arrest his attention if he saw it. He would not mistake it for an animal, for the only animal on the upper slopes is the snowy mountain goat.

However, Jack had to chance it. His principal fear was that Jean Paul, seeing him, might climb down from his rock and gain a long start of him to the valley. But he reassured himself with the thought that the Indian could not guess but that there were others waiting below. It would require a stout heart to climb down that rock in the face of possible fire from the trees.

Jack started his climb. Occasionally he could see Jean Paul moving around on his distant rock. Sometimes he thought the black spot seemed to stand and watch him, but this was his fancy. However, when he was halfway up, he saw him without doubt begin to climb the face of the third peak, and Jack knew that he

had been discovered. Jean Paul was going up instead of down. "I'll get him now," Jack told himself.

Thus began a strange and desperate race for the summit of the mountain. Until near the end it was anybody's race; Jean Paul was the nearer, but he had the steeper way to go; he was also the fresher of the two, but Jack was insensible of fatigue. The Indian kept himself out of sight for the most part, but occasionally the configuration of the rocks obliged him to show himself, and Jack marked his progress keenly. Meanwhile his own climb was nearly breaking his heart. He found that it was only a heart after all, and not a steam-chest. One cannot run up a mountain with impunity.

Jean Paul mounted the fourth peak about the same time that Jack reached the hogback, and threw himself down to ease his tortured breast for a moment. Jack had now to turn at right angles, and every step brought them nearer to each other. Jack had cover behind the summit of the ridge all the way to the foot of the last climb. It was impossible for either to guess the outcome. Jean Paul was still the nearer, but Jack was making better time. He ran along the slope on a level line and gained a hundred yards.

When he looked over the top again he was encouraged to see that Jean Paul was labouring hard. He had often to throw himself down in full sight to give his heart a chance. Meanwhile they were coming very close. They were already within gunshot when the peak they were both striving for intervened between

them. The breed was aiming for one side, Jack for the other. Jack wondered, should their heads rise over the top simultaneously, which would have the strength to lift his gun.

Toward the base of the peak of rock the ridge became steep and broken. Excruciating pains attacked Jack's legs, and his sinews failed him. He dropped to his hands and knees, and crawled on. He had almost reached the little peak, when suddenly a dark face looked down on him from over the top, and he had just time to drop behind a jutting shoulder of rock to escape the bullet that whistled overhead. The race had gone to Jean Paul.

Jack lay debating his next move. Meanwhile it was grateful to rest, and to feel the strength steal back. His case was not yet hopeless, he decided. The rounded cone of rock that Jean Paul held was easily accessible from any point of the arc visible to Jack, and from the speed with which the breed had gained the summit, he guessed that it must be even easier from the other side. With darkness to aid him he ought to be able to surprise his enemy. The sun was setting now. At close quarters Jack's revolver would give him an advantage.

But this same train of reasoning must have passed through the breed's mind, for later, upon peeping around his rock, Jack saw that Jean Paul had retreated from his peak, and was running off to the right across the flat battlement that connected it with the slightly

higher cone that was the true summit of Mount Darwin. He had started to scramble up the face of the rock. Springing up, Jack fired at him, but it was too far, and there was cover behind the jutting ledges. Jean Paul gained the top in safety.

Jack promptly seized the position he had abandoned. Rising cautiously over the side farthest from Jean Paul, he built himself, stone upon stone, a little parapet upon the summit, behind which he could lie and watch his enemy through the interstices. Presently he saw that Jean Paul was following suit, covering himself behind his wall while he raised it. A shot or two was exchanged, but without effect, and as if by mutual consent they left off. Their lead was too precious to be splashed on the rocks.

So they watched, each holding alone, as it were, a heaven-piercing tower of the same castle, with the battlement between. It was a dizzy perch. The whole world was spread beneath them, a world of confused gray, and brown mountain peaks like vast stalagmites pointing fingers toward heaven. It was like a nightmare sea suddenly petrified with its waves upheaved. In the whole vast wilderness there was no suggestion of mankind or of life. Up there the thin, cold air sharpened the senses; one seemed to become aware of the great roll of our planet to the east, and instinctively clung to the rock to keep from being flung off into space.

About two hundred yards separated the white man

and the breed. Jean Paul's position was some fifty feet higher than Jack's, and Jack had therefore to build the higher parapet. Nevertheless Jack's heart beat strong; he had him trapped now. At the same time it was a well-defended trap, and there he might sit watching him until starvation took a hand in the fight. Jack had only full rations for one day more; he suspected Jean Paul might be better provided. A red man starves slower than a white. Each could reach plenty of snow to quench his thirst, but there was nothing to burn up there. Jack looked through his peepholes, and considered how he might bring matters to an issue.

On his right in the corner between the hogback and the final peak there was a bowl a thousand feet deep or more, with a little lake in the bottom of a colour between sapphire and emerald. The sides of the bowl were steep slopes of rubble. Jack could not see all this from where he lay, but he had marked it on the way up. After dark he thought it might be possible to crawl around the rim of the bowl to the base of Jean Paul's tower of rock, and scale it from that side. This he could see, and he scanned it hard. It was a staggering climb — say, two hundred feet of precipitous limestone. But it was scarred and ridged and cracked by centuries of weather; and it was not absolutely perpendicular. It might be done.

Having made up his mind, he coolly rolled up in his blanket to sleep behind his parapet until dark. Small chance of Jean Paul's venturing across the battlement.

When he awoke it was as dark as it would get. He fortified himself with bread and meat washed down by snow-water. He left his gun rolled in the blanket — the revolver would serve better — and he propped his hat on a stone so that the crown would peep above his little wall. If it should become light before he reached him, it might serve to occupy Jean Paul's attention for a little. If he succeeded in knocking it off its stone, so much the better.

The passage around the rim of the bowl offered no special difficulty, except the danger of starting a miniature avalanche down the slope, and putting the breed on his guard. He took it a foot at a time. In an hour he drew himself up the first steps of his rocky tower, with the stars looking over his shoulder. Stars, too, seemed to be glancing up at him out of the depths of the black gulf. He would not let himself look down. With the faculty he had, he closed his brain to any thought of failing or of falling. "I'm going to get him! I'm going to get him!" it beat out like a piston, to the exclusion of everything else. Darkness aided him in this, that it prevented the awful hazard from forcing itself on him through his eyes.

His hands had to serve him for eyes, groping, feeling for the ledges and cracks like the antennæ of an insect. He gave himself plenty of time; he did not wish to arrive at the top until there was light enough to make sure of his man. He had it figured out in his odd, practical way: three hours, a hundred and eighty

minutes; a foot and a half a minute was ample. He could afford to rest and to steady himself on every wide enough ledge.

The face of the rock unrolled itself like a map under the eyes of his hands, and he remembered each foothold as he put it behind him. When he came, as he did more than once, to a smooth, blind face of rock that barred further progress, he patiently let himself down again, and hit off at another angle. His aim was to work himself gradually around to the back of Jean Paul's tower of rock, and fall on him squarely from the rear.

He became aware of the approach of dawn through a slight change of colour in the rock on which his eyes were stubbornly fixed. He could not tell how far he had yet to climb, but he had confidence in his calculations. Only once was his nerve shaken. A ptarmigan suddenly flew out from a cranny above his head with a soft whirring of wings. He wavered for a second, and the sweat sprung out all over his body. But he gripped the rock hard, and grimly forced the rising tide of hysteria down. "Twenty feet more and I'll have him!" he told himself.

At last, above his head, the face of the rock receded under his exploring hand, and he knew he had come to the top. This was the difficult moment, for how was he to know upon drawing himself over the edge that he would not find himself looking into the grinning face of his enemy. A little push back would be enough! He paused for a while, listening. Suddenly his heart

was gladdened by the sound of a shot. Jean Paul had fallen into his trap, and was popping at the hat. Jack called on all the forces of his body, and with a great effort drew himself silently over the rounded edge of the rock.

Jean Paul was ten yards away, and a few feet above him. His back was turned. He was exposing himself boldly over the top of his parapet, wondering perhaps why his shots had drawn no reply. Against the vast expanse of sky the silhouette still had the neat and ministerial outline; the Testament still peeped out of the side pocket. Jack sprang over the rock. Jean Paul turned, and Jack had an impression of blank eyes, fixed as by a blinding flash at night. Jack's rush bore him down before he could raise his arms; the gun exploded in the air. Jack wrenched it out of the man's hands and sent it spinning over the edge. They never heard it fall.

Drawing his revolver, Jack got up from the breed. Jean Paul lay motionless. Jack watched him warily. It was dimly borne in on him that after all he had been through his difficulties were only now beginning. He had got his man and so kept his vow to himself; but, richly as he deserved death, he couldn't shoot him disarmed. What was he to do with him then?

"Get up," he said harshly, "and over the wall with you."

Jean Paul raised himself to a sitting position. He had not yet fully recovered from the shock of surprise.

He stared at Jack with a kind of stupid wonder. "In a minute," he muttered.

Jack was willing enough to take the breathing-space himself. Both men were near the point of physical exhaustion. After the excitement of the chase the actual capture was tame.

"Well, 'ere we are," said Jean Paul with an odd start of laughter. "W'at you goin' to do?"

"I've told you," said Jack. "I'll take you to the fort or bury you on the way. I keep my word."

There was a silence between them. They were motionless on their little platform of rock, remote in the great spaces of the upper air. Jean Paul looked straight ahead of him with his hard, flat black eyes, in which there lurked something inhuman and inexplicable, and he idly plucked bits of moss from between the stones. What thoughts were passing through his head only God who made the redskins knows. When he turned his eyes again to Jack, it was with the old vain, childish, sidelong look.

"You t'ink you one brave man, huh, to climb up the rock las' night?"

"Never mind that," said Jack coolly. "You don't know yet what white men can do."

Jean Paul sprang up with an extraordinary display of passion. "White men!" he cried, flinging up his arms. "You are not the only men! I am a man as much as you! I am half white and I hate the whites! My fathers were white as well as yours. They beget




"Come and get me, white man!" cried Jean Paul, over his shoulder

us and they spit on us. Is it my fault that my blood is mixed? Am I your brother? No, your dog that you kick! Very well. I will do something no pure white man ever did. You go back and tell them!"

On the side of the river, the rock they were on ran up and ended in a row of jagged points like the jaw of a steel trap, overhanging a well nigh bottomless void. With his last words Jean Paul ran out on one of these points of rock, and stood there, with arms flung up, like a diver before he makes his cast.

Jack's heart contracted in his breast. "Come back!" he gasped.

"Come and get me, white man!" cried Jean Paul over his shoulder. Exaltation was in his face.

Jack put up his revolver and, crouching, made to seize the man's legs. Jean Paul, with a strange, loud cry, stepped off, and was no more. No sound of any fall came up. Jack had not the stomach to look over.

Four hours later he found the thing below. He had no tools to dig a grave, and he heaped a cairn of stones over it. On the face of a great boulder that overlooked the cairn he scratched an epitaph with the point of his knife:

JEAN PAUL ASCOTA
Killed by leaping from the summit
of Mount Darwin
August — 19 —
A bad man and a brave one.

Then Jack lay down and slept around the clock.

## XIX

## AN OLD SCORE IS CHARGED OFF

DRAWING near to the Sapi village on his return, Jack first came upon a group of children picking wild strawberries in the meadow, who fled screaming in advance of him into the compound. There, every task was dropped, and every dark face turned toward him. Fairly startled out of their affectation of stolidity, they streamed toward him from under the sun shelters and from out of the tepees with cries of astonishment. Jack was not deceived by the apparent warmth of their welcome; they were not glad to see him, only amazed that he should have come back at all.

He pulled up his horse in the centre of the square, and remembering the last time he had addressed them, looked them over with a kind of grim scorn. Just now he was unable to feel any of the kindness for these feather-brained children of the woods that Mary had. He knew the value of scant speech with them, and he made them wait for his announcement.

At last he said: "Ascota is dead!"

They stirred, and softly exclaimed, but one man

laughed. His example was infectious; incredulity showed openly in their faces.

"Big talk!" one said insolently. "Where's the proof?"

Jack quietly untied a little bundle from the back of his saddle, and unrolling the flour bag in which he had carried his grub, produced a little book and held it up. It was Jean Paul's Testament, that they all knew. There was a dark and swollen blotch on the leather cover. The absolute silence with which it was received was more impressive than their cries.

Jack handed it to the man who had spoken. It opened in his hands. There was a crimson stain around the edges of the printed page — wet crimson. The man who held it started back, and those looking over his shoulders gasped. The book was passed among trembling hands. Finally it came back to Jack.

"I will tell you where his body is hidden," said Jack. "A mile beyond the crossing of the creek out of Mount Darwin there is a big spruce on the right-hand side of the trail. On it I made a blaze with the sign of the cross in it. One hundred and ten paces from that tree as you walk toward the mountain he lies under a pile of stones. There is a big rock above, with his name and his story cut upon it."

It was very clear that none of them had any desire to seek out the spot; indeed, from that time the Fort Erskine trail was closed to the Sapis by reason of Ascota's grave being upon it.

"Who is the head man now?" Jack demanded.

They turned toward Etzeeah's eldest son, a sullen broad-shouldered brave, the best physical specimen among them.

"Take warning," said Jack clearly, "you and your people! Ascota was a bad man, a big mouth, a trouble-maker, who tried to stir you to evil, while he kept himself clear. He dared to speak against the great white father across the sea. It was the chickadee piping at the eagle. He is dead. We are all the children of the white father; his children and his servants. His police are now at the fort. You will do well to ride in and make your peace, before they come to punish you. That is all I have to say."

One silently brought him the horse he had left there, and, leading it, he rode through the quadrangle and away by the trail, without looking back. There was no demonstration against him now. The awe that Ascota had inspired in them was transferred to the man who had brought about his death.

Three hours later, as Jack's horse sidled down the hill into the Spirit River valley, his rider looked with a beating heart for the four little tents he had left in the meadow below. They were not there. A great disappointment filled him, and a sharp anxiety. What he had been through had made greater inroads on his reserve forces than he knew, and in Mary's deep eyes his weary spirit was unconsciously seeking harbourage.

However, as he rode up to the ashes of their fire he

saw that he had not been forgotten. In the forks of two little sticks driven into the ground was laid a peeled wand roughly shaped like an arrow, and pointing northeast. On it had been printed with a piece of charcoal: "7 miles."

Riding in the direction it pointed he found a freshly blazed trail through the trees. It led him among the poplars along the foot of the bench to the opening of a coulée, up which it turned. It took him north through a narrow valley wooded with great spruce trees. Through openings in the trees on either hand he could see the steep, naked, uncouth forms of the foothills that hemmed the valley in. A trickle of water flowed musically in the bottom of it.

It was difficult going for the horses over the fallen and rotting trunks of the untrodden forest, with its treacherous, moss-hidden pitfalls. The seven miles seemed to stretch out into thrice that distance before he came to the end of his journey. He smelled the smoke of a campfire long before he could see it. Finally the trail turned at right angles, and started to climb. He issued out of the trees, and there on a terrace of grass above him he saw the little tents and the fire; he saw Mary turning toward him with harassed, expectant face.

A little cry escaped her, and she came flying to meet him. Jack slipped off his horse. A little way from him she caught herself up, and her body stiffened. The action brought to Jack's mind all that he had forgotten,

and he turned a dull red. It had been in his heart to seize her in his arms. A horrible constraint descended on them both. They did not touch hands; they could not meet each other's eyes; speech was very difficult and painful.

"You are all right?" she murmured. "Not hurt?"

"Not a scratch."

"And Jean Paul?"

"He is dead."

She started with horror, and in spite of herself glanced at Jack's hands.

"He killed himself," Jack added quickly.

Her hands betrayed a movement of relief. There was a silence.

"What about you?" mumbled Jack, scowling. "What are you doing up here? Where is Davy?"

"I have something to show you," she said, with a strange look.

He followed her up the slope. He wondered why there were three tents pitched. The third was Jean Paul's A-tent. Mary threw back one of the flaps, and he saw a blanketed form inside.

"The kid!" he murmured, full of anxious concern. But even as he said it, he saw that it was not Davy. Stooping, and looking farther within, he saw a gaunt travesty of the face of Frank Garrod. The eyes were closed.

Something clutched at Jack's heart. He fell back.

"Good God!" he muttered. "You've got him! Is he dead?"

She shook her head. "Sleeping," she said. "Come away a little."

They sat on the other side of the fire. "Davy has gone back to the cache," she said, taking care to avoid Jack's eyes, "for milk powder, if there is any, and whiskey, and any medicines he can find. He will be back before dark."

"Has he said anything?" asked Jack, looking toward the tent.

Mary shook her head. "Nothing you could understand. He is very low. We will not get him back to the fort. He was four days in the bush. He had only berries."

"Then it's too late after all," said Jack apathetically.

"Who can tell?" said Mary. "They say often they get their full senses back for a little while before they die."

Jack shrugged. "Who would believe what he said at such a time?"

Mary was silent. Her capacity for silence was greater perhaps than Jack's.

"Tell me about finding him," Jack said.

"We started out as soon as you left," she said, carefully schooling her voice. "It was clear Jean Paul would take him among the hills to lose him, so we struck up the coulée at once. Too many days had passed for us to find their tracks, and it had rained. But

I was sure we would find him in the valley. The hills were too steep; besides, even a madman stays by the water. We looked all day without finding anything until near dark. Then we came on some tracks in the mud by the stream. We camped right there the first night. There were many coyotes on the hills, both sides, and I thought he must be near and they were — waiting." She shuddered.

"In the morning we found him," she went on in a low voice. "Just below here. He had fallen down beside the water. His face was in the mud, but the mosquitoes had not left him. So I knew he was not dead. Davy and I carried him up here where it was dry. I fed him a little bread soaked in water. Davy went back for the other horses and the dunnage, and to leave a sign for you. That was yesterday. This morning Davy went to the cache."

"Oh, Mary! what a woman you are!" Jack murmured out of the deeps of his heart.

She rose with an abrupt movement, and went to look at the sick man. She came back presently with a pale, composed face, and quietly set to work mixing dough for their evening meal. There was a long and sufficiently painful silence.

"It's a funny situation, isn't it?" said Jack at last, with a bitter note of laughter.

"Better not talk about it," she murmured. "Let us just wait and see."

Being forbidden to talk about it, the desire to do so

became overmastering. "Suppose he doesn't say anything," he began.

"It won't make any difference to your friends," she said. "They know you're not a thief."

"It's a queer business this having a good name and not having one," Jack went on, plucking blades of grass. "As if anybody cared who took the money."

Mary offered no comment.

"I'd lose my claims," Jack went on. "I couldn't go out to file them. But the governor would never put the police on to me, now. He'd be too jolly glad to get rid of me."

Mary refused to raise her eyes from the dough.

Jack thought she hadn't understood what he was driving at. "You see it would let me out there," he went on. "This would be my country for ever and ever, and the people up here my only friends."

There was another silence. He looked at her hungrily. The hard young face was soft enough now.

"Mary," he murmured hoarsely at last; "I don't give a damn if he never speaks."

The dough-pan was dropped at last. She lifted a tortured face. "Don't," she murmured low and swiftly. "Don't you see what it means? Don't you see how you're hurting me? You mustn't wish it. Maybe our thoughts are influencing his sick brain this minute. He *must* speak! He must tell the truth and clear you. Nothing else matters. You must be able to go wherever

you choose. You must be able to look any man in the face. I couldn't bear anything else."

Jack scowled, very much hurt — and a little ashamed perhaps. "I didn't think you were so anxious to send me outside," he muttered.

She threw him the look of pity and despair that women have for the men they love who will not understand them, and, springing up, went to look at her patient again.

By and by Davy arrived. His greeting to Jack supplied the warmth that Mary's had lacked. Jack hugged the boy with a sidelong look at his sister. Afterward Jack briefly and baldly told his story by the fire. Our hero had no talent for description.

"I slept until dark, and then just crawled around the edge of the slide below the ridge, and climbed up the back of the rock."

Davy's and Mary's eyes were big. "Climbed up the back of the summit at night?" murmured Mary.

"Sure," said Jack. "I took it slow and easy. As soon as I got light enough I dropped on him from behind. That was one surprised redskin!"

"Then what happened?" demanded Davy, breathlessly.

Jack frowned. "He jumped off," he said shortly.

"Jumped?" they cried. "Was he killed?" asked Davy.

"Quite," said Jack grimly. "And some to spare." That was all they could get out of him.

They ate their supper, and the sun went down. Mary, leaving the boys smoking by the fire, took up her vigil within the door of the little A-tent. Davy chattered about the prairie chicken that had flown across the trail, about the squirrels that had broken into the cache, about the moose he had seen swimming the river. Jack with an unquiet breast sat listening for a sign from Mary.

Suddenly she came out of the tent, dropping the flaps behind her. "Jack!" she whispered breathlessly.

He sprang to her.

Her clenched hands were pressed hard to her breast. "He's awake," she murmured.

"Is he — sane?"

"I — I don't know," she said a little wildly. "He looked at me so strangely. Oh, Jack!"

He took her trembling hand in his firm one. There was no selfish passion in him now. "Steady, Mary," he said deeply. "We've done the best we could. Whatever will happen, will happen. Better go away for a little."

She gave his hand a little squeeze, and shook her head. "I'm all right," she murmured. "I must know.

Jack threw back the flaps, and, stooping, entered. "Hello, there!" he said quietly.

The sick man turned his head. His eyes were unnaturally bright, and a feverish colour suffused his face; his lips were swollen. "Macgreegor," he whis-

pered. He passed a hand across his eyes. "It is Macgreegor, isn't it?"

Something melted in Jack's breast at the sound of the old boyish nickname. "Sure thing," he said, kneeling beside him.

Garrod reached out his hand, and Jack took it. "Thank God, you're here," he murmured in the soft, hurried accents of the fever patient. "I'm going, Macgreegor. I've made a rotten mess of it, haven't I? I'll be glad to go if I can square myself with you first. Where are we? It doesn't matter. Can anybody take down what I want to say?"

Mary's eyes were big with tears. She produced the pencil Jack had given her, but it appeared there was not a scrap of blank paper in the outfit, not a scrap of paper except the little Testament with its ugly stains. Davy handed it to her. On the fly leaves, with their damp, red borders, Mary prepared to write as Garrod dictated.

"Lift me up a little, Macgreegor," Garrod said. "I can breathe easier. Your arm under my shoulders. That's good. It's like the day at Ste. Anne's when I fell out of the tree. We were seventeen then. You were always holding me up one way and another, Macgreegor. You never knew what you were to me. It was quite different from your feeling for me. I can say it now, anyway. I was a bit cracked about you."

"You'll wear yourself out talking," said Jack with gruff tenderness.

"It won't take me long," Garrod said. "I'll have time."

He expressed no further curiosity as to where he was, or how Jack had come there. He referred to no recent happening. His attention was fixed on the all-concealing gray curtain ahead, through which he must presently pass, and he hurried to get what must be said, said in time. There was something uncanny in the perfect clearness of his thoughts, after what had passed.

"You wonder how I could do as I did if I felt like that toward you," he went on. "Well, sometimes I hated you too. I was jealous of you, you were so much cooler and stronger than I, so much more of a man. I don't suppose you understand. We're not supposed to be like that. I guess I was born with a queer streak."

On the other side of Garrod sat Mary, ready with the pencil and the book. Davy, large-eyed and solemn, filled the doorway.

"I, Francis Garrod, being about to die, do desire to make my peace with God if I may, and with my friend Malcolm Piers, whom I have deeply wronged. It was I who took the money from the Bank of Canada that he was accused of stealing. None but I knew beforehand that he was going away, nor his reasons for going. The morning after he went the sight of the money in the vaults tempted me. He had influential friends and relatives, and I knew there would be no scandal. I took the money in old bills that could not

be traced. I have not known a minute's peace since then. It drove me mad by degrees, and it is the cause of my death.

"Should any doubt be cast on this confession, it is easy to verify it. Within a month of the theft I opened accounts in the following banks and branches of banks in Montreal." A list of the banks followed. "In each I deposited a small sum. The total will be about forty-five hundred dollars. The rest I kept by me. Furthermore, among the papers in my desk will be found a letter from Malcolm Piers dated from Winnipeg a few days after his disappearance. The postmark is intact. In every sentence of this letter there is proof that the writer had no theft on his conscience when he wrote it, and no money. So help me God!"

Garrod signed the page with a sufficiently firm hand, and Davy and Mary wrote their names beneath for witnesses. Jack gave Mary the grim little volume to keep for him, and she and Davy went away.

"That's done," murmured Garrod with a sigh. His fictitious strength seemed to ebb with the sigh. He slipped down on Jack's arm a little. "Don't leave me, Macgreegor," he murmured. "It's all right with us now, isn't it?"

"Sure, I won't leave you," said Jack.

The voice came in a whisper now with many breaks and pauses. "The lights of Ste. Catherine's street, Macgreegor, on a Saturday night, and the crowds, and the stairs up to the gallery of the old Queen's,

how they echoed under our feet! We saw the 'Three Musketeers!' . . . 'Member the rink in the winter? And the old Park Slide? . . . And Ste. Anne's, with the sun shining on the river? There's another pair of kids winning the tandem paddles now, eh? . . . How good it is to have you here, old fel'! 'Member the first day I came to work at the bank! You blacked Husky Nickerson's eyes because he blotted my ledger. We nearly all got fired, but you saved us with your pull. Husky, too! How I admired you, with your crooked eyebrow, and your curly hair, and your straight back!

"Well, it's all over for me, old fel' . . . and nothing to show! I'll be twenty-six next month. . . . Life's a sad thing . . . and empty! . . . I wish — I wish I had done differently. . . . It's good to feel your arm, Macgreegor! . . . What time is it, old fel'? Pretty near closing-time? . . ."

Three days later Jack, Mary, and Davy rode into Fort Cheever in the evening. On the fourth horse was lashed a significant looking bundle neatly wrapped in canvas, the canvas of the other dead man's tent. A heartfelt welcome awaited them. David Cranston showed no anger at his children. He only looked from Mary to Jack and back again with a kind of wistful, inquiring scowl.

During the interval of their absence the steamboat

had arrived, and after waiting twenty-four hours, had returned down river only that morning, taking Sir Bryson and his party. Since nothing could be guessed of the probable return of Jack, the captain had not felt justified in waiting. Jack guessed, furthermore, that Sir Bryson had not exerted his authority to delay the steamer. The lieutenant-governor had had his fill of the North. The steamboat had brought up Sergeant Plaskett of the mounted police, and a trooper from the Crossing.

Garrod was buried at dusk on the hillside behind the fort. Sergeant Plaskett read the burial service. Afterward Jack told his story, and at daybreak the policemen started west to interview the Sapi Indians. Before noon they had returned with Ahcunazie, the eldest son of Etzeeah, and the members of his immediate family. He was on his way in to make peace with the authorities, as Jack had advised.

David Cranston learned something more from Mary, and something from Jack. The situation was too much for the honest trader. He shook his head dejectedly, and had nothing to offer. Measles broke out again among the Indians at Swan Lake — at least Mary said it had. At any rate, she rode away with Angus, Davy's next younger brother, the following day, and Jack did not see her again.

Cranston had a letter for Jack. Thus it ran, the paper blistered with tears, and the headlong words tumbling over each other:

My Own Jack: You *are* mine, aren't you? I am nearly crazy. I don't know where you are or what has happened, and they're taking me away! How could you go without saying a word to me? How can you be so hard? As soon as you get this, come to me! Come to me wherever you are, or whatever has happened! I'll bring father around! Only come! I can't live unless you come! When I think of your failing me, I am ready to do anything! I have no one but you. They all look at me coldly. I am disgraced. Only you can save me. I love you! I love you! I love you! . . .

And so on for many pages. Older heads can afford to smile, but to the inexperienced Jack it was terrible.

The police hearing was concluded two days later. At evening that day Jack, declining a lift down the river in Plaskett's canoe, pushed off alone on the same little raft that had brought him to Fort Cheever a month before.

## XX

## THE LITTLE GREAT WORLD

MR. MALCOLM PIERS stood before the mirror tying a white bow at the top of an effulgent shirt bosom. It was a room in Prince George's best hotel, and it had been his room for six weeks. His brown ruddiness had paled a little, and his face looked harder and older than the wear of only two months warranted. Unhappiness or perplexity, or indeed any emotion, caused Jack to look like a hardy young villain. Only the eyes told a tale; a profound discontent lurked in their blue depths.

He finished dressing and took down his overcoat and topper. Evening dress became him well, and he knew it, and took a certain satisfaction in the fact, for all that the world was going badly. His abounding health and his hardness marked him out from the usual dancing man. Hunching into his overcoat, he put out the light, and with the act the night out-of-doors leaped into being. Struck by it, he went to the window and flung it up.

The stars were like old friends suddenly brought to mind. So they shone over his own country where there were no grosser lights to outface them impudently; so

they shone nights he had lain well-wrapped on the prairie, counting them while he waited for sleep; so they shone through the spruce branches in the valleys. The town of Prince George is built on top of the bench, and his window looked into the deep valley of the river. It brought to mind his own river, the serene Spirit; his and Mary's; Mary's whose eyes were as deep and quiet and healing as the stars.

Leaning against the window-frame, he lost count of time. He thought of the nights he had careered over the prairie on horseback under the stars. He had called his new horse Starlight, a thoroughbred. How the beast would love the prairie! How his knees ached for him this minute, to bear him away from all this back to *her!* How her eyes would shine at the sight of Starlight! Never had such a horse been seen north of the Landing. How he would love to give him to her! How fine she would look on Starlight! He fell to picturing her under all the different circumstances he remembered. Sweetest and most painful was the recollection of how he had kissed her sleeping in the light of the fire, and how her soft, warm lips had smiled enchantingly under the touch of his.

He was brought back to earth by the ringing of the telephone bell in the room behind him, and a summons from below. He went down stairs cursing himself. "You fool! To let yourself get out of hand! What good does it do?"

It was the night of the hospital ball in Prince George.

The provincial parliament had reassembled, the courts were sitting, and the little western capital was thronged with visitors more or less distinguished. The ball was held under the largest roof in town, that of the armory; the band had been imported all the way from Winnipeg, and the decorations and the gowns of the women would have done credit to Montreal itself. To the women the particular attraction of the occasion was the presence of an undoubted aristocrat, Lord Richard Spurling, seeing Canada on his grand tour.

Linda was radiant, the greatest little lady there! There was nothing here to suggest the frightened child who had left such a desperate note for Jack. Her world had not turned its back on her; on the contrary, she had made a grand reéntrée with the halo of adventure around her pretty head. She was wearing a dress of rose-madder satin straight from Paris, a marvel of graceful unexpectedness, hanging from her thin, alluring shoulders by a hair, and clinging about her delicate ankles. She was wearing all the pearls that had shared her adventures, besides some new ones, and a jewelled aigrette in her dark hair. A whole company of cavaliers dogged her footsteps, including the lordling himself, a handsome and manly youngster, irrespective of the handle to his name.

Jack was not one of the company that surrounded her. Jack and Linda had been leading a kind of cat and dog life the past few weeks. Their engagement was admitted, but had not been announced. Jack did not

shine in Linda's world; glumness is the unpardonable sin there. Moreover, Jack was a perpetual reminder of things she was ashamed of now. And there were so many other men! At the same time she kept a tight hold on him by the means that such little ladies know so well how to employ.

Jack kept out of her way until it was time for the first of the two dances she had vouchsafed him. As he approached her she could not but acknowledge his good looks, she was a connoisseur, but a good-looking thundercloud! The dance was not a success; they were out of harmony; they stepped on each other's toes!

"Let's stop," said Linda fretfully.

As soon as they were out of earshot of the crowd she opened on him: "You haven't been near me all evening!"

"You know I'm at your disposal," Jack said stiffly. "But I will not make one of that train of young asses that follow you around."

"You don't have to," retorted Linda. "And you needn't be rude. Follow whoever you please around, but for heaven's sake don't stand against the walls with a face like a hired mute!"

This stung. Nevertheless, Jack doggedly admitted the justice of it to himself, and "took a brace," as he would have said. "I'm sorry, Linda," he said manfully; "I'm a bit off my feed to-night. You know I'm no good at this sort of thing."

She was merciless. "It's not only to-night. It's all the time; ever since you've been here. It's not very flattering to me to have you go round with me as if you were dragged against your will."

Jack pulled in his lip obstinately. He had made his apology; she had rebuffed him; very well. Linda, glancing sideways under her lashes, saw that she would get no more out of him in this connection. She made another lead.

"Take me to the north end of the gallery," she drawled. "I promised to meet Lord Richard there at the end of this dance."

Jack obeyed without comment.

"He's an awfully good sort, isn't he?" she went on, with another sidelong glance at Jack. "I was surprised to find out how well he dances. Englishman, you know! He likes Canada better every day, he says. He's going to stay over for the golf tournament if I will let him. He is looking for a ranche somewhere near town."

Jack woke up. "First-rate head," he said heartily. "We've talked a lot about the North. He wants to make a trip with me."

Linda bit her lip.

Later Jack sought out Kate Worsley, with whom he had a dance. These two had made great progress in intimacy.

"Shall we dance?" she said.

"No, please," said Jack. "Linda says I dance like her grandfather. One gets rusty in five years!"

"To sit out then," said Kate. "Let's get in the first row of the gallery, where we can hang over and watch the giddy young things!"

Their conversation did not flourish. The night outside still had Jack by the heartstrings; loping over the prairie under the stars, the far-off ululation of a wolf, a ruddy campfire in the dark, and beside it, Mary!

"You're not exactly garrulous to-night," remarked Kate.

Jack turned a contrite face to her. "I'm sorry. I wouldn't be rude to you, Kate!"

"Bless your heart! you don't have to talk unless you are moved to it. I don't like to see a pal looking so down, that's all."

"Down?" said Jack with a laugh. "I'm living in hell, Kate!"

"Tell me about it, old man. You can, you know."

He shook his head. "I can't talk about it. I only sound like a fool. It only makes matters worse to talk about it."

Kate knew her men. "Change the subject then," she said cheerfully. "How are business matters going?"

"All right," said Jack. "I have sold my claim and the other one to Sir Bryson's company for twenty-five thousand — a fair price."

"Cash or stock?" asked Kate.

"Cash. I have no talent for business. I don't want to be in the company."

"The other claim?" she asked.

"Miss Cranston's?" he said self-consciously

"I thought there were three."

"The third belongs to Linda."

"Well, what are you going to do now?" she asked.

He looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"You're too good a man to hang on here in town," she said off-hand.

"Do you think I'm staying because I want to?" he burst out. "Good heavens, I'm mad to get away! I hate all this! I'm fighting myself every minute!"

She looked at him inscrutably. "My young friend, you're blind!"

"You don't understand," muttered Jack miserably.

"Don't I?" she said, wistful and smiling. "I've thought quite a lot about your case, but I wasn't sure that I had the right to speak."

"Oh, Kate!" he said turning to her quickly; "you know I'd take anything from you!"

She smiled at the way he put it. "I'm not going to abuse you. My advice to you is simply — to go!"

Jack stared at her.

"Go!" she repeated. "Ride away! Ride back to your own work in your own country, the place you suit, and that suits you. You'd never be any good here. Look at Linda in her finery! This is the breath of her nostrils. She has her eye on Montreal — London eventually. How could you two ever hope to pull together? Mind you, I'm her friend too, and I believe that I'm doing her a service in advising you to ride.

Girls get carried away temporarily like men, though they're not supposed to. Girls often get hysterical, and write much more than they mean. Letter-writing between the sexes ought to be made a felony."

"She has my word," muttered Jack.

Kate shrugged. "There's the man of it! It is a fetich! Would you spoil Linda's life for the sake of keeping your word, not to speak of your own life and — perhaps a third!"

Jack's face was obstinate. "I'll see Linda and put it straight to her," he conceded.

Kate's eyebrows went up. "These men!" she said helplessly. "You ought to know her a little by this time. That will do no good. Much better go without. It's a thing that ought to be broken off. What matter who does it, or how it's done? The result will be good."

"I couldn't go unless she releases me," Jack said.

Kate got up smiling. "We must go back," she said. "A man must do as he will. You are an awfully nice boy, Jack. I believe I love you for your very mulishness. Write to me sometimes out of the North."

"I haven't gone yet," he said grimly. "You must promise to forget every word that has been said if I ask you to."

"I promise, dear old man."

For Jack to think of a thing was to put it into instant execution. He set off in search of Linda. One of the likeliest places to find her was on the balconies. There was a suite of rooms across the front of the armory,

the officers' club, with a long narrow balcony overhanging the street. For the occasion of the ball, potted palms had been placed at intervals down the balcony, making a series of little nooks, each with two chairs, and each reached through its own window. The largest of the rooms with the balconies outside had been set apart for Sir Bryson and his party.

Dancing was in full swing below, and Jack found the room empty. None of the little nooks outside were occupied. In one of them Jack sat down to wait for the end of the dance. Almost immediately two people entered the next bower to his. Their voices were pitched low, and at first he did not recognize them.

"Now for a cigarette," said the man.

"Lucky man," said the girl. "I'm dying for a puff!"

"Have one," he said. "I'll take it from you, if any one comes."

There was a silence, and the striking of a match. Then a long-drawn feminine "Ah-h!" which was undoubtedly Linda's. Jack stood up to speak to her over the dividing palms. It was not a thing to do, but Jack was a man of one idea at a time; he *had* to speak to her, and his other dance was at the tail of the evening. He wished merely to make an appointment to speak with her later.

As his head rose over the palms he was just in time to see the blond head of the English boy and Linda's darker, bejewelled head draw close together, and their lips meet and linger. They did not see him.

Jack dropped back as if he had been shot, blushing and furious with himself. To be a peeping Tom! a thing he loathed. He silently cut across the room within the balconies, praying that they might not hear him. Wild horses would never have dragged any admission from him of what he had seen.

But when he got his breath again, as one might say, oh! but he found his heart was beating blithely! He felt as if he had burst out of a hateful chrysalis. Life was full of joy after all! A little song rang in his ear: "It's all right! It's all right!" Laughter trembled in his throat.

He waited about on the stairs for Linda to come down. She finally appeared, cool and scornful, her heels tapping on the stairs, the thing in her hair nodding and sparkling. Who would ever guess that her little Mightiness had just been kissed! The spring of laughter bubbled up inside Jack. He presented a bland face to her, but he could not hide the shine in his eyes, nor the smirk about the corners of his lip.

"What is it?" asked Linda, staring at the change in him.

"Whom have you the next dance with?"

She named a name.

"I know him," said Jack. "Wait for me upstairs, and I'll see if I can't make an exchange. I want to talk to you."

Linda's curiosity was aroused, and she went back upstairs with Lord Spurling. In five minutes Jack

had rejoined her, and the two of them went out on the balcony again, in the same nook Linda had shared with the Englishman.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

"Linda," he said, "we've done nothing but quarrel since I came. Let's cry quits!"

"It hasn't been my fault," she said, all ready for another.

"Never mind whose fault," he said. "Let's cut it out!"

"What's come over you?" she asked curiously.

"Look here," he said, "up North I promised that I'd come and claim you as soon as I cleared myself. Well, I came, and I've been here long enough to show us both that it's no go. We're not suited to each other. We only get on each other's nerves. Give me my word back again, Linda. Let's shake hands on it, and say good-bye!"

Linda started, and looked at him with big eyes. "Jack!" she murmured. "You'd desert me? You can't mean it? What would I do?"

She got no further. The great eyes, the plaintive tremulo, the threatened tears, all the old tricks after what he had just seen, struck Jack as too funny! His laughter broke its bonds. He threw back his head, and gave it way. There was nothing mocking or bitter in it; it was pure laughter from the relief of his heart. He laughed and laughed. He had had no laughter in weeks. He was obliged to lean against

the window-frame and hold his ribs as at a vulgar farce.

Linda's expression graduated from amazement to pale fury. She sprang up. The jewelled aigrette fairly bristled with rage. "How dare you!" she cried. "Shut up! I hate you! You make me feel like a perfect fiend! I'd like to scratch your eyes out! Go back to your squaw! It's all your fit for. I was going to speak to you myself. Understand, I'm throwing you over! I despise you!" She stamped her foot. "Go back to her, and be damned to you both!"

She vanished. Such was the end of that affair.

Jack went in search of Kate, and found her on a man's arm bound supperward. "Could I have a word with you urgent and private?" he whispered.

Kate looked at his happy eyes and nodded. "Front balcony, five minutes," she murmured back.

The balcony again.

"Kate, I'm off!" he cried. "This very night. In an hour I'll be pounding the North trail on Starlight. I'm so happy I can't keep the ground. If the boats have stopped running, I'll ride the whole way through. Kate, dear, you've been a powerful good friend to me. I'd like to kiss you good-bye."

"You may," she said, smiling and lifting her face.

"There!" he said. "There! and there! and there!"

"Mercy!" said Kate. "I'll have to retire to the dressing room for repairs! Good-bye, and God bless you!"

After the family had gone to bed, Mary and Davy Cranston stole back into the living-room, and quietly blowing up the fire, put on fresh sticks. They sat down before it, nursing their knees. Nowadays there was a stronger bond than ever between Mary and Davy. In that disorganized household in the winter this was the only chance they had to talk together.

"What do you suppose he's doing to-night?" said Davy.

"Who knows?" said Mary. "A party of some kind, or the theatre."

"If father had let me go out with him," said Davy, "I could have written and told you everything he did."

"Father was right," said Mary. "He'll let you go when the time comes. But that sort of thing would only unsettle you. We're not society people."

"I don't see why you're not," said Davy stoutly.

"It's too complicated to explain," she said in a level voice. "Anyway, I wouldn't like it."

"Whatever Jack does is all right, isn't it?" demanded Davy.

"He was born to it," said Mary. "That makes the difference. Besides ——"

"Well?"

"I don't think he likes it either. But it's necessary for him just at present."

"I wish I could see him!" cried Davy.

Mary was silent.

"I mean to be just like him," Davy went on. "Do you think I'll ever be as strong as that?" he asked anxiously.

"It doesn't matter," said Mary, staring into the fire. "You can be as brave and honourable."

There was a knock at the front door. Brother and sister looked at each other in surprise.

"A sick Indian," said Mary.

Davy went to see. He closed the door of the room after him. Presently Mary heard a little cry, quickly smothered. Davy came in again breathless, and with shining eyes.

"There's — there's some one wants to see you!" he said shakily. "Oh, Mary!"

She ran out into the hall. The front door was open, and he stood there, broad-shouldered and bulky with much clothing, dark against the field of snow. He was bareheaded, and the moonshine was making a little halo around the edges of his curly pate. He held out his arms, and in a twinkling she was in them.

"Mary! My love!" he murmured. "I nearly went out of my mind wanting you. I've come back for you! Never to leave you again!"

Their lips met, and their tears ran together. Mary was the only woman who ever saw those hard blue eyes fill and overflow.

THE END



THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

JUL 4 1968

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